GOLDEN LADDER

SERIES

THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

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THE

KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

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PREFACE.

THIS very plain little volume is intended for the help of those who like to study the Bible, and who cannot get at the great books of the scholars. It holds, I believe, all that is necessary to make a thorough study of the history of the kingdom of Judah. I have followed Keil and Delitzsch very closely, as any student of them may see; with the help of Rawlinson, Stanley, Porter, Pusey, and Thompson. These are the principal authorities which, in this bit of Bible study, I have found useful; and from one or other of them I have drawn the materials of most of my pages.

It is understood that this book be read beside an open Bible. Its pages would have been more independently readable, if I had quoted at large in many places instead of only referring to chapter and verse. Space forbade; and besides that consideration, it remains always true that the words of the Bible make most impression when read in their own proper place.

WEST POINT, *Feb.* 1878.

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THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

CHAPTER I.

TRUNKS AND PORTMANTEAUS.

We were to go to Palestine for a three-months' journey. Uncle Sam, Dan, Liph, Priscilla, and I. The real reasons of our going were several. Uncle Sam had business in Syria; that was the first thing. He must go for his business. Then one day the boys were speaking of the lessons for the next year, which were to be in part upon the Kingdom of Judah, and Dan expressed the wild wish that we could go to Palestine and study the subject there on the spot! From that word it all came about. Priscilla exclaimed, and I exclaimed, and Liph's eyes shot fire; and then Uncle Sam looked at me.

"A good thing for Tiny, wouldn't it?" said he. And I suppose something in his face or his manner encouraged them all to burst forth in wishes and pleadings. I did not say anything, yet Uncle Sam kept looking at me.

"Do you want to go, Tiny?"

"Uncle Sam, I would give anything in the world!"——

"Ah, so would you all. I believe I would as lieve take you as go without you."

For grandmother was dead, and there was nobody specially to take care of us except Uncle Sam. We had a very staid, excellent upper servant, an American woman,

who had lived a long while in the family and was devoted to us. Uncle Sam consulted her and found that she had no objection to the proposed plan; so finally, after much consideration and weighing of *pros* and *cons*, it was determined upon. We were to go to Palestine to study the history of the Kingdom of Judah. So we said. Uncle Sam laughed and said we were to go to Palestine as a sanitary measure. But he added, that it was a big thing altogether!

It was summer time then. Uncle Sam said that with us on his hands he would rather not face either the heat or the rains; to avoid both, as far as we could, we would go about the beginning of September. From this time there was just one thing thought of among us young ones, our preparations. What should we take with us? And indeed Uncle Sam himself gave a good deal of care to the matter. We all studied Porter's "Handbook." Never in my life was a book more fascinating to me.

"Uncle Sam," said I, "Mr. Porter recommends tents—will you take a tent?"

"Most assuredly."

"Will you? O Prissy! he will take a tent. But, Uncle Sam, one tent would not hold us all, unless it was very big."

"What's the remedy for that?"

"Will you take *two* tents?"

"I leave you and Prissy to settle about that, while I am gone down town."

So he went, and we drew together with delighted, important faces.

"Tents!" I re-echoed. "Just think of the fun! But, Prissy, I don't see how even *two* tents would be enough?"

"We must take the fewest possible."

"Of course."

"Let us see. You and I and Mrs. Barrett could sleep and dress in one; Uncle Sam and the boys in another; there's no doing with less than that."

"Must we have Mrs. Barrett in our tent?"

"Why, yes, Tiny, we must, to be sure. People cannot

have *everything* when they are travelling, I suppose. But then there is the cooking—and the eating"——

"Cooking?"

"Yes. We should want breakfast and dinner and supper just as much as at home; and I guess, a good deal more."

"Who will do the cooking?"

"Don't you notice what this book says, that the way is, to engage a person there who sees to all such things? but then there must be a tent for a kitchen, whoever does it."

"Then we could eat out of doors, if the weather was good; or get into one of our tents if it wasn't. O Prissy! I feel as if I should die of joy!"

"Don't do that," said Prissy. "Joy is better to live by."

"But think, three tents! how pretty they would look. One tent is pretty by itself, but imagine three!"

"I can't," said Prissy. "It all seems like an impossible dream. Only here we are making our preparations. I don't know what to take. Our writing-cases, of course; I mean to keep a regular journal."

"Oh, so do I."

"Bibles, of course. No other books, I guess."

"No, we should not want them."

"As little baggage as we can do with, I suppose."

We set about overhauling our wardrobes; settled what trunks we would take, and Prissy even laid a few things in hers. But now came a surprise. Uncle Sam sent us home some new, strong leather portmanteaus. One for each of us. That was charming. Then he provided some umbrellas with dark linings. Some strong bath-tubs, enclosed in wicker casings, were arranged to hold all the little personal matters of daily and nightly use. A small case of medicines also; a portable cooking-lamp; tea and biscuit, and a small stock of wine also, and brandy, for cases of necessity. Prissy and I had new waterproof cloaks and hoods, and small dressing-boxes. Every single item and

detail was matter of delight and curiosity and excitement, and with so many of us in the party it was of necessity that the accumulated details reached a respectable gross amount. Uncle Sam, however, said it would do very well. *We* took, for books, only Porter's "Handbook," and our Bibles; Uncle Sam added a few others to his stock. We had all our preparations complete some time before we were to sail.

"Where do we go first, sir?" asked Liph. "Where do we land, I mean?"

"London."

"Oh yes, sir; but I mean, when we get to Palestine?"

"I think, Jaffa."

"Think of being in Jaffa!" said I. "That is Joppa; Joppa where Peter lived with Simon the tanner, and prayed on the housetop, and saw his vision."

"I fancy he prayed on other housetops, wherever he might happen to be," said Uncle Sam. "The housetop was the most private and retired place to which one could go."

"But we aren't going to see where Peter lived," said Liph. "I am tired of Peter. I have heard no end of him in Sunday school. We are going to study the Kingdom of Judah on the spot."

"With whom did the Kingdom of Judah begin?"

"With David, didn't it, sir?"

"David reigned over all Israel *and* Judah."

"With whom then? Solomon?"

"Solomon carried the kingdom to its highest pitch of glory and its widest limits of extent. His kingdom was, according to the figure, 'from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth;' that is, from the Euphrates to the utmost limit of Palestine, the wady Rhinocolura."

"That is not the 'ends of the earth,' sir," remarked Liph.

"Not strictly. And so, strictly, the words describe the kingdom of Him whose type Solomon was. They go beyond Solomon, as other details of the prophecy do, my boy, you will find."

"But the Kingdom of Judah?" said Prissy.

"The twelfth chapter of First Kings tells you how it began, and the eleventh chapter tells you the reason why it began. Study them, and we will talk of them some other day."

We studied them. And then we would have drawn Uncle Sam into a discussion of the history, but he would not be drawn. He said we must wait. We were to study the history on the spot. We might make what preparations we pleased.

I think Prissy and I nearly learned those chapters by heart. Meanwhile the weeks went on, the first of September came; the third, we sailed in the "Ariosto." It would make a big book if I were to copy out all that stands in our journals, written about our ship and the voyage, and our stay in London, and our further voyage to and through the Mediterranean. What delight to be going through the Mediterranean! where every bit of land had such a long history. I was not sea-sick at all after a day or two, and the boys and Priscilla had got over their sickness; so now we enjoyed everything together and as much as possible. We sat on deck and talked all the time, except when we were silent by the very force of admiration and wonder. For even on our own vessel the people began to be astonishing to our unused eyes. Especially after we left Alexandria. We could hardly talk much then. Jews and Arabs, Levantines, who were neither Jews nor Arabs, Moslems and Greeks; the figures, the faces, the costumes, the manner and bearing of the different groups and individuals, excited momentarily our curiosity or our delight. Mrs. Barrett and Uncle Sam agreed that pleasure and sea air were making me look stronger already. But I shall never forget our first sight of the low coast of Palestine. I think it almost took away my breath; and Priscilla's cheeks flushed pink.

We had a perfectly quiet time for landing, and so got past the Jaffa rocks which I had dreaded. Uncle Sam's first business here was to secure a dragoman, and make his

arrangements. Prissy and I rested, while the boys went everywhere with Uncle Sam. By afternoon they announced that everything was in fair train, and that we were to take our first ride immediately. I could hardly eat luncheon for the excitement. And there, by the time we were ready, came before the door the various animals for our cavalcade. For me, a quiet little white donkey; for Priscilla, a pony not quite so quiet, but very gentle and easy-going; it was owing to a happy combination of things, Uncle Sam said, that he had been able to secure these two and be sure of their good qualities. And he had bought them for us. And upon them the boys were now strapping two new saddles, fresh and beautiful, which Uncle Sam had had made on purpose for us in New York and brought along. So Mr. Porter advises, and so Uncle Sam had done, and our happiness was beyond expression. He and the boys had their own saddles too, but their steeds were much less distinguished.

I could write a great deal about Jaffa and our first ride in the gardens. But I must pass on. Indeed, we did not delay at Jaffa, only so long as was necessary to complete all our arrangements and get a little rested and wonted, and me a little accustomed to the saddle. I seemed to grow strong with the need for it; perhaps it was pleasure, perhaps it was air and exercise; at any rate, I made the journey to Jerusalem with tolerable comfort a few days after our landing.

CHAPTER II.

OLD JERUSALEM.

It was matter of renewed delight to all of us young ones, that Uncle Sam did not take us to a hotel in the city. Instead, he had our tents pitched on the Mount of Olives; and we entered upon a new kind of life, most delicious to me, and I think to all of us, Uncle Sam included. We had three tents. Ours, Prissy's and mine, was very comfortable. The ground was spread with a double carpeting, one of Indiarubber cloth, and one over that of soft thick carpet. We had little iron bedsteads, that could be folded up to carry away when we moved; all our toilet articles were packed in the bath-tubs before-mentioned; we had folding camp-chairs, a native table; our portmanteaus held clothes and books and writing-cases and varieties. Our dragoman proved quite equal to his recommendations; he took care of everything; and the daily meals were a subject of constant amusement to us, as well as interest, for the latter of which our open-air life and activity bodily and mental fully accounted. Our servants, too, were studies. They did their work well; and we had no care, nor any interruption to our researches and pleasures.

Of course, in the first place, for days we studied Jerusalem. Every morning we rode into the city and explored it, as long as I could bear the fatigue; then we came home to our encampment, had dinner, rested, and studied the city again from our point of view on the mount; when the sun was sinking in the west, and the Moab mountains were showing rosy and purple tints. We were never weary of looking and thinking and trying to imagine. Just below us lay the valley of the Kedron; what had not happened and passed there! Over against us, in full view, rose the Mosque of

Omar in its beauty, standing somewhere near where once the Temple must have stood, in its much more magnificent beauty; we could see the tops of the cypresses that grow in the wide enclosure, where once the bare feet of the Lord's priests trod the marble pavement of His courts. We tried to imagine how it had been. We sat with our Bibles in our hands commonly, towards evening, and looked and talked.

"The enclosure probably answers in general to the great platform made by Solomon," Uncle Sam said. "*In general;* but not a stone that you see stands where it did in Solomon's time, or in Herod's time."

"Do you think any of them are the same stones, Uncle Sam?" Priscilla asked.

"Some of the great foundation stones of the lower wall, there is little doubt. They show the marks of Hiram's builders; and down under ground, undoubtedly, at the bottom, some of the lower courses lie where Hiram's builders laid them."

"We cannot see those, Uncle Sam."

"No, Tiny. They have been seen, though, by the English explorers; and the quality of the masonry is described as being most admirable. The joints can hardly be seen. When the work was new, it must have had the look of an elaborately-panelled wall; the low, wide bevellings of the stones meeting as if it were all one block."

"Perhaps Herod did that work, sir," put in Liph.

"Perhaps he didn't."

"Yes, sir, perhaps; but how can you tell?"

"The work of his time was not done in that way. That peculiar style of masonry goes back everywhere to the times of Solomon and David, or near to them."

"Why might not some of the other kings, later, have done it?"

"Because they did not live in times quiet enough for the undertaking and executing works of very great cost and splendour; and because their coffers were not full enough. The kings that came after Solomon had other affairs on their

hands. Solomon had ten thousand men constantly at work in the forests of Lebanon, hewing and dressing timber; relieved every two months by another ten thousand; he had eighty thousand men at the same time cutting stone in the quarries, and seventy thousand porters. A prince with enemies to fight or fear, or with anything less than boundless revenues, don't you see, could not engage in such amusements."

"But building the temple was not just an amusement, Uncle Sam," said I.

"No. But, Tiny, if we are to take the king's word for it, he did amuse himself in every way he could think of, building included. 'I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards.'"

"What houses did he build, sir?" Dan asked.

"But I thought we were to study the history of the Kingdom of Judah?" said Priscilla, "and that begins with Rehoboam."

"You want to know what Rehoboam had to start with," Uncle Sam answered; "and you want to know the condition of the land generally. So let us try and get a bit of a notion of what Jerusalem was then."

"It is so changed, Uncle Sam; how can we?"

"By gathering facts, Tiny, and letting our imaginations work a little. And the first fact was the Temple itself. It stood there over against us, glittering in gold, rich in carved wood and wrought tapestry, to the last possible point of richness; vessels of gold for the service of it were in multitude, and other vessels of almost as precious wrought brass. Then around it lay its wide beautiful courts, the foundations of which were built up from the sides or the bottom of the valleys that enclosed the hill; the 'mountain of the Lord's house,' as the whole structure was called; the outermost court being six hundred feet on a side; and at the east side, towards us, adorned with the colonnade which went till the latest times by the name of Solomon's Porch."

"But, sir," said Liph, "did not Herod rebuild the cloisters?"

"Not Solomon's. At least, it is distinctly stated by Josephus, that four hundred cubits, or six hundred feet, of the eastern cloister were standing as Solomon's work in the time of King Agrippa; and that Agrippa was asked to rebuild them, and did not. Herod enlarged the outer court, it is said; but six hundred feet of it belonged to Solomon's time. The foundations of the court were built up from a great depth; the bottom, at the south-west angle, lies now a hundred feet below the present surface of the ground; laid in great stones, measuring some of them from twenty to thirty feet in length, four or five feet thick, and six or seven deep. The lower courses lie untouched where Hiram's builders laid them."

"How could they, sir?" said Liph.

"They do."

"But I thought it was said that every stone should be thrown down?"

"Every stone within sight of those spoken to. The lower courses of foundation stones were already covered by filling in of the valley bottoms; those next above would be covered when the work of destruction began, by the ruins of the topmost works, don't you see? and so preserved."

"How beautiful it must have been!" said I.

"Where Solomon's porch stood, columns of porphyry and verd antique are still to be seen built into the present wall, which is built up of ruins. Then you must imagine massive gates and gate-houses in the wall on every side of the court; massive and beautiful. And then let us think of some of Solomon's other buildings. Read the first twelve verses of 1 Kings vii., Dan."

Dan read, and then remarked that he did not understand.

"Only so much as this," said Uncle Sam; "that Solomon built him a palace, which took thirteen years in the building, and was according to the sumptuousness of all his other doings. The exact plan of the parts cannot be made out from the description. It is supposed that the house of the

forest of Lebanon, after the fashion of oriental architecture, was a magnificent pillared gallery enclosing an open court, and with several stories of rooms above the gallery, or colonnade. The 'porch of pillars,' verse six, does not mean a porch attached to the house, but an independent 'pillared hall,' having its own porch; and the third, the judgment-hall, held Solomon's magnificent throne. It is further supposed, that this judgment-hall stood in front of the dwelling part of the palace, and so in a sort formed the entrance to it. Imagine now these three buildings surrounding a court, which, according to Eastern fashion, would be the outer court; then behind the judgment-hall a second inner court, round which rose 'his house where he dwelt,' and the house for the queen; the whole making one great pile, spread out and covering a large extent of ground; and built, as the word is, with 'costly stones,' 'great stones,' hewn and squared and wrought and masoned according to the beautiful masonry of Hiram's builders."

"Whereabouts did it stand, Uncle Sam?"

"On the west side of the Temple area, you know, ran north and south a deep valley, called the Tyropæan. Just on the other side of this valley, on the corresponding brow of Zion, the king's house must have been."

"But, Uncle Sam," said Liph, "it seems to me there were four buildings, or five, specified."

"Look at 1 Kings ix. 10."

Liph looked, and held his peace.

"Between the two, the king's palace and the Temple, there was a lofty bridge, or viaduct, carried across the valley. I will show you to-morrow, in the foundation wall of the Temple area on that side, the stones which formed the beginning of the first arch of the bridge."

"Now, Uncle Sam."

"Still there, Tiny. And the first pier, the foundation of it, has been also discovered by digging some forty feet off. Then Solomon—but read the latter half of the ninth chapter." And after I had read it, Uncle Sam went on. "You see what a condition of strength and splendour

Solomon left behind him in the kingdom. The wall of Jerusalem was defended with towers; other cities were likewise made strong with fortifications, either to serve as checks upon enemies or to protect home trade. The city and the kingdom generally were floating in riches; some came in by tribute from foreign nations, some came by the commerce which Solomon had instituted and fostered; so that silver was a drug in Jerusalem in those days. All this Rehoboam came into. But he was like many another oriental prince, spoiled with pride and power. He could take no account of what was already lurking under all this outside show in the minds of the people."

"What was under it, Uncle Sam?"

"Discontent, Tiny."

"*Discontent?* I thought they were so happy in Solomon's reign."

"The land was at peace, and the pride of the people was gratified, no doubt. Splendour is a very fine thing; but, after all, it does not put bread in people's mouths."

"But, sir," said Liph, "it gives work to the poor."

"So it is said. The fact remains, Liph, that just where there is the luxury of extravagant living, there precisely is the misery of the abject poor; and almost nowhere else."

"But the people were not poor in Solomon's time, were they?" I asked.

"Not the king's own servants and great officers; and it is true that Jerusalem was filled with riches; 'silver was nothing accounted of.' Nevertheless the enforced labour demanded of the people was terribly burdensome. Thirty thousand men, 'out of all Israel' were forced to go, a month at a time, for four months in the year, to hew timber in the mountain of Lebanon along with Hiram's workmen.'

"Those were descendants of the Canaanites," said Liph.

"They were nothing of the kind. They were chosen 'out of all Israel;' see ch. v. 13; a 'tribute of men;' even if they were paid for their work they would not have liked

it. Besides them, Solomon had one hundred and fifty thousand stone-cutters and burden-carriers in the quarries; those were made bondmen of; and those were the descendants of the Canaanites left in the land. Look at chap. ix. 20, 21, and 2 Chron. ii. 16, 17."

We turned over the leaves of our Bibles, and satisfied ourselves.

"That was not the whole," Uncle Sam went on. "The king had the monopoly of trade. It was his ships that sailed from Ezion-Geber down the Red Sea to lands unknown, and brought home 'gold and silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.' It was the king's merchants that brought horses, and chariots, and linen, out of Egypt, for his profit. So, no doubt, with the other lines of trade which were carried on by caravans inland, one traversing the Arabian peninsula, the other crossing the desert to Assyria and Babylon. For these latter Solomon built Palmyra, 'Tadmor in the desert,' and Baalath in the north of Palestine. Then, children, if King Solomon's riches were great, his expenses were greater. It seems he had to get a loan of near £500,000 from Hiram, and thought to pay him with some poor Canaanitish towns in the north of Galilee; but Hiram did not like these and gave them back; so probably the loan had to be repaid in money. And mayhap riches, and power, and luxury, wrought upon Solomon as they have wrought upon other men, to make him proud and despotic and unregardful of common people's rights or interests. Solomon had grown very like other oriental magnificats in one article of state, his family of a thousand wives; it is very likely he resembled them in other things."

"'His wives turned away his heart after other gods,'" said I, reading. "Uncle Sam, where were those altars he built for his wives' gods?"

"Over there, Tiny, on the southern ridge of the Mount of Olives. With the altars, there was no doubt, as was usual, a sanctuary built close by to each; and as Solomon did nothing in the ordinary fashion, so three splendid and

imposing temples must have stood there, in face of the Lord's Temple on Moriah, insulting it and defying him. And thither all the strangers would go to worship who came to Jerusalem; and the city of God became a sort of cosmopolitan place."

"But, sir," said Liph, "everybody has a right to liberty of conscience."

"What then?"

"It seems to me that was just toleration, and showed Solomon's wisdom. His foreign wives had a right to their own worship."

"Not there in Jerusalem. Look at Deut. vii. 1–6."

We turned to the place eagerly and read. Then Uncle Sam bade us read Deut. xvii. 16, 17.

"He was wrong all through," said I. "Why, it is forbidden here for the king to multiply silver or gold, 'greatly.' Why, Uncle Sam?"

"The Lord knows what comes of it, Tiny. So it was forbidden that he should take many wives. And so it came to pass that 'the Lord was angry with Solomon.' And so it befel that the Lord 'stirred him up' adversaries. So you begin to see now the inheritance into which Rehoboam his son came. Not only the wide dominion, the prosperous land, the magnificent city, the extended commerce; but secret murmurings among the people, and open enemies upon his borders, and an offended God."

"What enemies?" Dan asked.

"Here they are in this eleventh chapter. One was the Edomite Hadad, who had fled to Egypt when a child, at the time David slew all the men of his nation. Enmity had never ceased between Edom and Israel; and now had come to pass Jacob's prophecy, that Esau should serve his brother; see it in Gen. xxvii. 40. But when David was dead, and Joab too, then Hadad came back to Mount Seir to do all the mischief he could. The second mentioned is an enemy in the north; Rezon, a man who for some reason unknown was a fugitive from Zobah, who gathered a company of followers out of the wreck of the army, after

David had overthrown his king Hadadezer; and finally made himself king of Syria and reigned in Damascus."

"What did he do to Solomon?"

"Not much, Tiny; for Solomon 'reigned over all the kings from the river even unto the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt,' and it is further stated that 'Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon's life. But you see these were preparing trouble for those who should come after Solomon. But Jeroboam actually revolted. He 'lifted up his hand against the king.'"

"I don't understand all this about Jeroboam," said I. "None of us can. We were studying it."

"Well, let us see. Jeroboam was a young Ephraimite, strong and spirited, whom the king noticed and set over all the Ephraimites and Manassites who were employed upon the heavy work of the fortifications. Solomon was then perfecting the defences of the city."

"Yes, and what does 'repaired the breaches' mean?" said Dan. "How could there be breaches in the wall?"

"Yes, there had been no enemy there for a long time," said Liph.

"The word cannot mean 'breaches' in the ordinary use of the term. Probably it refers to the gap in the fortifications made by the Tyropæan valley, where it came down between the ridge south of the Temple and the opposite height of Zion; and the meaning would be, that Solomon closed up that gap, and so carried the city wall without a break round to the wall of the Temple area. However it be, Jeroboam was set over the Ephraimites; and it would seem that he and they rebelled secretly at the burdens laid upon them; the old jealousy against Judah flared up; and then, one day when Jeroboam was outside of the city, he had that interview with the prophet Ahijah. Read from verse twenty-seven on to the end."

"And that was what made Jeroboam rebel?" said I.

"The combined causes."

"Well, he had reason," said Liph. "Of course, when he was told that, he had a right to go on and have it; and of course he must rebel."

"Did he get it by rebelling?"

"No, sir."

"Then he had better done his duty and been quiet."

"Why did the prophet give him that message, then, Uncle Sam?"

"Possibly, that Jeroboam might prepare himself for his high destiny."

"But don't you think it tempted him?"

"God never tempts any man to do evil. See James i. 13. David was anointed king over Israel; and Saul was his enemy and in his power; but nothing ever made him swerve from his loyalty. He obeyed the man who held the place of the Lord's anointed, and waited for the Lord to execute His own purposes in His own way."

"That's true," said I. "I am glad. I see it."

"There's another thing, sir," said Dan. "There was more than one tribe left to Solomon's son. How was that?"

"Ten and one do not make twelve either, do they?"

"No, sir."

"The numbers must be taken as symbolical. Ten is the number of completeness. All Israel went off with Jeroboam; David's house kept a fraction; and it remained a fraction, although not only Benjamin but also it would seem Simeon went with it; Simeon being in the far south. So the northern kingdom had only nine tribes, Levi being not counted."

"I thought Solomon had married the daughter of Pharaoh," said Liph; "and here Pharaoh received and entertained Solomon's enemy."

"Another Pharaoh. Shishak was the head of a new dynasty."

"And now we come to the twelfth chapter, and to Rehoboam!" said I.

"And the first thing said is, that Rehoboam went to

Shechem for his coronation, as we should call it. So it follows, does it not, that we must go thither too?"

"To Shechem?" we echoed as with one voice.

"I think so."

"Oh, delightful! But our tents are just all in order, Uncle Sam."

"And now it will take but an hour or two to put them 'all in order' anywhere else. We are not to be fixtures anywhere, Tiny. However, we will stay out the week where we are; I have some business to attend to in Jerusalem. Monday, if all's well, we will break camp."

I was almost too full of pleasure. We had shut up our Bibles, and now sat and watched how the sinking sun threw new lights upon the city, and the valleys gathered shadow, and the mountains of Moab sent back ruddy reflections.

"How beautiful it is!" I sighed. "And just so the sun was shining on those red hills a thousand, two thousand and more, years ago!"

"And just so as then he would be shining now on the splendours and beauties of the city—if the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem had kept true to their God."

"Do you think so, sir?" asked Dan slowly.

"More than that, Dan; the sun will shine on Jerusalem's glory yet again. Turn to Jeremiah xxxiii., v. 24, and read."

"'Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the Lord hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus saith the Lord, If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.'"

"Isn't that figurative, sir?" said Dan.

"Wasn't it fulfilled when the Jews came back from Babylon?" said Liph.

"It is no doubt figurative, but the truth of the figure will answer to the truth of the thing figured. And a remnant of Judah came back from captivity, Liph, but not of Israel, the northern kingdom. They never came back. But 'in those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping; they shall go and seek the Lord their God'" (Jer. 1. 4).

CHAPTER III.

THE REVOLT.

For the rest of that week we stayed where we were. Every day we went about, examining things in the city; and at night we talked. Uncle Sam made us notice the great stones in the foundation of the Temple area; we saw where the springing stones show the beginning of Solomon's viaduct across the Tyropæan valley; but it was very hard to imagine that ever he and the Queen of Sheba had gone across there in state and splendour. Everywhere we tried to understand how the city was in Rehoboam's time, when it stood in its greatest beauty and strength; the walls and towers, the fortified gateways, the Temple rising on its hill in riches and glory, and the immense pile of Solomon's palace. And then it was strange to look over to the southern height of the Mount of Olives, and fancy the heathen sanctuaries he had been persuaded to build there. We always came home to our tents tired and hungry, with the oddest mingling in our minds of common, little things of every day, and great, strange, momentous things of long ago. I think I was glad to go away and travel for a day or two, to rest my head. But travelling did not stop the thinking, neither.

Early on Monday morning we broke camp and set forward. It was easier than I thought it would be; our dragoman and servants managed it all, and we had nothing to do, or almost nothing. Besides, every article was packed and arranged for carrying about; everything had its place; and after the first day we had never any trouble or even delay. We took a very early breakfast, and rode away, leaving Mustapha to manage the rest. Mustapha was our factotum.

My donkey was easy and kind, and riding was delightful. The weather perfect. We went into the city first,

where Uncle Sam wanted to see the consul, and then out by the Damascus gate; crossed the Kedron at its upper end, and went up the slopes of Scopus. There we stood still and turned to look. We were in no hurry, for my strength must be taken care of, and the tents must have time to go on well ahead of us. So we sat in our saddles and enjoyed the view without any hindrance. One could not tire of looking. Jerusalem is pretty seen from here, though not near so pretty as in the view from the road crossing the Mount of Olives; but from wherever I saw it I always felt sad at the sight. Such a fallen Jerusalem! Moslem minarets and Christian churches, but nothing Jewish at all to be seen. And there beyond, to the left, the line of the hills of Moab seemed like a silent witness and protester; and the Mount of Olives another; and the height called Nebi-Samwil another. *They* are all unchanged.

"What are you thinking of, Tiny?" my uncle Sam asked; and I told him this.

"Yes," said he, "they *are* witnesses. Don't you know how the Lord appeals to them?" And Uncle Sam took his Bible out of his pocket. "In Deuteronomy xxx. 19, the word is, 'I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death;'—and again chap. xxxii., 'Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.' Then in Isaiah, when the people had long chosen wrong, comes the appeal again to these silent witnesses—'Hear, O heavens; and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.'"

So unspeakably mournful and touching was the look of those silent watchers of hills, standing round about Jerusalem, that I could not just then say a word. Priscilla remarked that she had never understood those words before; and then we turned our horses' heads and went on. Through very barren, forbidding country for a while; but Uncle Sam bade us take notice how easily it might be made fruitful. After some time we began to get among beautiful glens,

planted with olive-trees and fig-trees, and vineyards covering the upper slopes. Within sight of the village of Ain Yebrood, in a lovely grassy hollow near a spring, at last we saw our tents just getting up. I cannot tell how glad Prissy and I were, for the rough day's ride had tired us. We dismounted and sat on the grass till our tent was ready; carpets were laid, and camp-chairs got out, and beds were made, and all. Then we sat down in the door of the tent and watched the men putting up the other two tents, and above all, our cook at work on the dinner. The sun was not set; the light was most beautiful upon the old vineyard-crowned hills, catching the fig-trees lower down, and in places brightening the olive-trees in the bottom. It was good to rest; and we rested, while the boys were scrambling everywhere, and our servants were busy with all the preparations for the night, and Uncle Sam sat a little way off under an olive-tree with his Bible. Shall I ever forget it? And then we were called to dinner, or supper, which you will. We sat round a native table, on carpets, all but me and Prissy; and enjoyed our bread and tea and rice and stewed lamb and fruit, as nobody can who is not travelling in Palestine. After dinner the things were removed, but we sat still in our places, and took out our Bibles.

"After all," said Dan, "how come we to be going to Shechem just now?"

"I am very glad we are," said I. "Did Rehoboam on his journey come this very way, Uncle Sam?"

"Probably. It is the direct way; it has been the great highway to the north for centuries. In Solomon's time of course the road was good and could be traversed upon wheels. Rehoboam came in his chariot, and no doubt came smoothly, where we have had rough riding to-day."

"But why did he go to Shechem anyhow?" Dan asked.

"To be crowned," said Liph.

"To be anointed and to receive the homage of the people, rather," said my uncle. "It was the right of the tribes to

come together and make king the man the Lord had appointed."

"Couldn't they choose their man?"

"Certainly not. The king was 'the Lord's Anointed, and must be of the royal line of David. He was the Lord's vicegerent only; God was the true king of the people."

"But, sir, Jeroboam was not of David's line."

"What then?"

"God gave him the kingdom."

"In one sense. But Jeroboam was a rebel and a usurper. He did not wait for God to give him the kingdom. He took it. And the tribes chose him without asking counsel of the Lord. The old jealousy of Ephraim against Judah broke out afresh; it had only been slumbering. So, purposing the mischief, the people would not go to Jerusalem to make Rehoboam king, but sent for him to come to Shechem, where they would have things their own way, and at the same time sent for Jeroboam to be there and head them. They knew he was hostile to the reigning house, and had once rebelled against it already."

"And *that* was why they went to Shechem!" said I.

"Don't you remember how it was when David was made king over all Israel? How the vale of Hebron was filled and flowing over with the thousands who came from every part of the land, 'with a perfect heart,' to make David king? And for three days there was feasting and rejoicing and procession-making. There came a hundred and twenty thousand men from the other side of Jordan alone; of Ephraim there were near twenty-one thousand; from Zebulon and Naphtali in the north came no fewer than eighty-eight thousand, and twenty-eight thousand from Dan. And they came bringing supplies for the feast with them; bread and fruit and wine and oil and sheep and oxen abundantly; 'for there was joy in Israel.' Now things were changed. Yet the Lord promised that David should have 'a light alway' in Jerusalem. His line should not die out."

"Where is his light now, sir?" asked Liph.

"Liph, I'm surprised at you!" said Priscilla.

"Where the glory of it will never be dimmed again," said Uncle Sam quietly. "'Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever.'"

"Where is that account of the making David king?" said Dan.

"In 1 Chron. xii. And compare 2 Sam. ii. 4, and v. 3."

We all turned to the chapters and read the verses.

"Then see 1 Chron. xxix. 22, where the tribes made Solomon king in the same way, though he had been formally anointed before. 1 Kings i. 33–39."

"So for David they went to Hebron," said Dan; "and for Solomon they went to Jerusalem; but for Rehoboam they will do nothing, I see. It is plain they just meant mischief."

"Did Rehoboam know?" I asked.

"I doubt if he knew of the private intimation given to his father. Solomon was too wise a man to weaken his son's hands with such a foreknowledge. The prophecy made to Jeroboam was very likely to be public property; but Jeroboam was an acknowledged rebel, an exile at the court of Egypt, and Rehoboam no doubt despised both it and him."

"Perhaps it was not wise in Solomon not to tell him," said Liph.

"I do not know that he did not tell him," said my uncle. "If Rehoboam was told, he was one of those men to whom a warning is of no use. They go their own way the more obstinately."

"What sort of a man was Jeroboam?"

"Ambitious and unprincipled. He is said to have married an Egyptian princess, the sister of Hadad's wife; and he was known as 'the man who enclosed the city of

David;' that is, superintended that bit of fortification committed to him by Solomon. But in after ages he was otherwise known as the man 'who made Israel to sin.'"

"I don't see how he was worse than other kings who introduced idolatry," said Liph. "Solomon himself! And other kings of Israel and Judah too; worse idolatry a great deal. Jeroboam only set up the golden calves; he meant the people to worship Jehovah."

"Therein he did worse mischief than the others were able to do. I give you that problem to study, all of you; for the present, Tiny must go to rest."

And indeed rest was very good that night; nothing could have been more pleasant than the going to bed, except the getting up! We were always early when we were on our journeys, and indeed in Palestine generally; and I cannot tell my feeling of delight when I looked out from my tent door and saw the old terraces and vineyards and fig-trees in the morning light, and the grey olive-trees in the bottom of the valley, looking so grey, for the sunlight was not yet on them.

There was not much talking in the morning, except about the day's work, and what was immediately before us. Breakfast over, tents struck, we mounted and rode on.

I remember an extraordinary fig orchard that we rode through, not far beyond Yebrood. The ground all full of cork; in fact, I do not know whether there was most surface of soil or of limestone visible; and the soil was in tiny patches; but, nevertheless, Uncle Sam said it was very rich. Stones were carefully gathered up into heaps, and between the heaps of stones and slabs of rock, in the little spots of ground, the fig-trees grew. In winter, Uncle Sam said, it looks very barren indeed, with the black bare stems of the fig-trees standing among the rocks and no leaves to cover and hide it all. Beyond that we came among beautiful glens again, passed the spring called the "Robbers' Fountain," and some distance beyond that we turned out of our way to go and see Shiloh. It is just a little hill

covered with ruins, with higher hills around it and a beautiful view of valleys and openings of valleys on different sides. Here we spread our carpets and lunched and rested and talked; for we wanted to give Mustapha time to get the camp pitched, and I was tired. Then we gathered ourselves up and went on.

I do not remember much of the road farther on. Only I know that Uncle Sam made us take notice of the change from the barrenness of Benjamin's territory to the riches of Ephraim; the country growing finer all the while. At last we came to the top of a ridge and saw below us, before us, a wonderful little plain stretching away to the north for miles. Low heights to the east of it, steep higher hills coming down on the west of it, and the groups of grey olive-trees dressing it out in beauty. No houses at all to be seen on it, and no break of fence or hedge, only that wide level beauty. We cried out—

"O Uncle Sam! what place is this?"

"The plain called el-Mukhna."

"That tells me nothing."

"It is the place where Jacob bought a parcel of ground from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem."

"O Uncle Sam! is it? Then Jacob's well is there."

"Jacob's well is there, just at the foot of that high hill to our left."

"What is that little white spot on the top of the hill?"

"That is a Mohammedan *wely*, and marks the place of the temple once built on Gerizim by the Samaritans."

"Then that is Gerizim! And beyond it is Ebal. And where are our tents, Uncle Sam?"

They all laughed at me, but the truth is, I was fearfully tired.

"Come on," said Uncle Sam; "we have some riding yet to do."

So we had, for it was a good two hours before we could dismount at our camp. Once there, and off my donkey, I forgot fatigue; or at least I was so happy that I did not care for it. Our tents were pitched just by Jacob's well,

with Mount Ebal before us on the right, and Mount Gerizim before us at the left; and if we faced to the east, there was the beautiful plain stretching away in its level smoothness and richness; and the sun, getting low, threw over it all long lines of light. I could hardly believe my happiness in being there. After dinner, rested and refreshed, we got out our Bibles and sat down for our "blessed hour," as I called it.

"And here Jacob's tents were pitched once," said I.

"Abraham's before that, when he came first into Canaan, and rested at the place of Sichem, under the oak of Moreh."

"It says, the *plain* of Moreh."

"And it should say the 'oak.' There seems to have been a famous oak here then, that was well known for its beauty and size."

"Why, is it ever mentioned again, sir?"

"It seems to be mentioned several times. Look at Gen. xxxv. 4. Jacob had called upon his household to put away idolatry, and they gave him their idols and their amulets, and he buried them under 'the oak that was by Shechem.'"

"And it was to this plain that Joseph came looking for his brothers," said I.

"And here, when the Israelites came into the land, Joshua assembled the people and parted the tribes on one side and on another of the altar he built, half of them on Mount Ebal and half on the Mount Gerizim; and there Joshua read in the hearing of the people all the words of the law."

"Could they all hear him, Uncle Sam?"

"You see how narrow the valley is. And in this air voices are carried far and heard distinctly. Still nowadays, if there is some public news to be proclaimed by the crier, he goes up to a house-top or a place on the mountain and tells it, and he is heard. People make themselves understood at great distances without seeming to exert their voices much."

"All the people could not be posted on those two hills," said Liph.

"The two ridges of hill run back a long way. But we may suppose the principal men stood nearest about the altar; and the rest in the plain."

"And think of those 'Amens,' sounding first from one hill and then from the other!" said I. "Shechem would be a sacred place ever after, I should think."

"Then Joshua set up a stone under the great oak, to be a witness to the people of what they had done there."

"That same oak where Jacob buried the amulets?"

"Three hundred years before? It might well be, Tiny. It was certainly the same oak under which Abimelech was made king two hundred years later. 'The oak of the pillar'—it is called, in Judges ix. 6, that is, the pillar or memorial stone that Joshua had set up. Now the tribes summoned Rehoboam to be made king in the same sacred place."

"He went to Shechem," I remarked. "How far off is that?"

"A mile or so up the valley. You shall see it to-morrow."

"Now, Uncle Sam, let us begin regularly with the twelfth chapter of 1 Kings. 'All Israel were come to Shechem;' the place must have been full!"

"All Israel does not mean Judah and Benjamin here, but the ten rebellious tribes. The little plain of Mukhna must have been lively."

"They were not rebellious yet, sir," Liph objected.

"Pardon me. Why did they not go to Jerusalem? They summoned Rehoboam to the sacred place of Ephraim, and called Jeroboam the Ephraimite to head them. The long jealousy and impatience of the dominion of Judah had gathered head during the latter years of Solomon's reign, and burst out now in a flame that was not to be extinguished for many a day."

"Uncle Sam, I do not understand the second and third verses."

"They are a little confused. Turn to 2 Chron. x. 2, Tiny. There you get the probable connection. Jeroboam in Egypt heard that Solomon was dead and Rehoboam his successor. Thereupon he came back from his banishment. Hearing that he was come back, the tribes sent and called him. Jeroboam from his former experience could better than anybody be their mouthpiece."

"Then they only wanted a pretext," said Dan. "But had the people really been oppressed under Solomon?"

"The nation had been prosperous, as never before and never after. Every man sat under his vine and under his fig-tree, and no enemy molested them. But it is very much the way of the multitude to take the blessings of good government as things of course, and the rules and exactions by which such government is maintained, as unwarranted oppression. However, Solomon, as I said, may have been too much of an oriental despot in the latter years of his reign."

"Even Jeroboam," Dan remarked, "would hardly have had the boldness to say publicly what he did, if there had not been some truth in it."

"Uncle Sam, Rehoboam took a great while to consider."

"Over one day? No, Tiny, I think not. He must have seen that the affair was serious. What he said was the same as telling them to come the day after to-morrow. Every fraction of a day is reckoned a day; years the same."

"Then he consulted first the old men who 'stood before Solomon' and then the young men who 'stood before' himself. What does that mean?"

"They were his officers and servants, 'waiting in his courts,' that is, standing before him. Look at 1 Sam. xvi. 22, and Dan. i. 5, and Prov. xxii. 29."

"Oh yes, Uncle Sam; I see."

"Now look at 1 Kings xvii. 1, where Elijah uses the same expression of himself as a servant of God. He uses it repeatedly. And see Luke xxi. 36."

"Wasn't Rehoboam very foolish, not to mind the old men?"

"I think he was short-sighted and proud, and foolish, as you say; though I doubt, Tiny, the consequences of following the old men's counsel might not have been so soothing as they hoped. The ten tribes would have been deprived of the pretext they wanted, for the time."

"And in the fifteenth verse it says, 'the cause was of the Lord!' How could it be?"

"I do not know."

"You do not know, Uncle Sam?"

"There are a great many things I do not know, Tiny. The Lord had determined to take the ten tribes away from the house of David. Now He did not make Jeroboam's disloyalty, nor Ephraim's jealousy, nor Rehoboam's imperious temper; all these evil things existed; and the Lord, without interfering with any of them, let them play just to accomplish His plans."

"But He might have hindered them," said Liph.

"It was not His purpose to hinder them."

"But God cannot be the author of evil, sir," said Dan.

"I just said, He did not make or cause these evil powers or forces; only determined the channels in which they should act. The *evil* is not worse, because it shows itself out."

"Isn't it?" said Priscilla.

"No, my dear. The evil is in the feeling, the intent. Putting it in action makes it more evident to our eyes, but not to the Lord's."

"I think I understand," said Dan. "It is as if I had a head of steam power, and let it turn into one channel or another channel according to the work I wanted it to do?"

"That will stand," said Uncle Sam. "I think you have the idea."

"I do not comprehend yet," said Liph, "why Rehoboam was such a fool, to give the answer he did. He could have refused their request without insulting them, couldn't he?"

"It is the speech of an oriental despot, who is incensed at the insolence of the people in making their request."

"Then," said Priscilla, "what is the meaning of this sixteenth verse?"

"Why," said Liph, "the people declared off, don't you see? 'What portion have we in David?' That is to say, he was not of their blood, and they would have nothing to do with him."

"And you see how deep the evil lay," Uncle Sam went on. "The jealousy of Ephraim breaks out in the shout—'Now see to thine own house, David!' *Their* support and adherence they took away for ever. Once before, these same words had been a watchword for the people; when all Israel, that is, the ten tribes, rebelled against David himself, under the leadership of Sheba the Ephraimite. But you must take notice, too, that at the bottom of this jealousy of Judah lay a heart of disobedience towards God. Else the ten tribes would as well as the rest have owned and accepted the Lord's Anointed, whoever he might be."

"But was not the kingdom of Judah just as bad? Didn't they hold to David's house because it was of themselves?"

"No doubt. Yet in the kingdom of Judah the worship and service of God was maintained much of the time in its truth and purity."

"I thought the people were for ever falling into idolatry?" said Prissy.

"So they were, when bad kings were at the head of the state. Nevertheless, idolatry really prevailed only about one-fifth of the whole time of the kingdom's separate existence, two hundred and fifty-three years long. Only fifty-three years of that time they followed idols."

"Was it worse in the kingdom of Israel?"

"Certainly. From the very beginning, *they* forsook the pure worship of God. Nominally, indeed, they held to Jehovah; but they fell away from Him utterly in spirit. They ceased to go up to Jerusalem, the only place, remember, where they could legally bring sacrifices; and they

betook themselves to Jeroboam's calves of gold, using the familiar Egyptian symbol for Him who had forbidden any likeness of Himself whatever. They fell away from God totally, except in name and pretence. Therefore they had no need or temptation to introduce other idols, of the nations around; they had idols and an idol worship of their own, and so their heathen propensities were gratified."

"Uncle Sam, what is meant by the 'children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah'?"

"In verse seventeen? It must mean those people of the ten tribes who had from time to time taken up their dwelling in the southern part of the country. All the tribe of Simeon may be included; if you look you will see that Simeon's territory was a little bit out of the south of Judah, and as it were embraced by it."

"Then what does verse eighteen mean?"

"I have no doubt by that time Rehoboam would gladly have conciliated the revolting tribes; and so he sent Adoram to talk to them; perhaps to propose measures or to hear propositions. You can see the temper of the people in what they did. They received him with showers of stones, under which he fell; and the king saw that he himself was not safe. To escape for his life was the only thing left him."

"And it happened here!" said I. "I wonder where they stoned Adoram? In this beautiful little plain?"

"Perhaps. The tribes had 'departed unto their tents' after the final interview with the king; the tents were probably pitched here."

"Uncle Sam, to-morrow we will go up into the valley, and see Shechem and everything, shall we?"

"Not *everything* to-morrow, I should say; but we will do what we can. And what we cannot see to-morrow, we will try to see next day. Now go to rest, my dear."

CHAPTER IV.

REHOBOAM AND SHISHAK.

REST was sweet that night. Yet I was awake early; I was never a very great sleeper; and how shall I tell what it was to me, the sight of the morning sun shining upon the two faces of Ebal and Gerizim! I had got up and dressed, without rousing Priscilla; and wrapping my mantle round me, for the morning was slightly cool, I went outside the tent with a camp chair. What was it to me, to see those two mountain heads bathed in the morning sunshine! Ebal and Gerizim! Quiet and still and peaceful as they looked, it bewildered me to think of what had been once. When all Israel was posted on the sides of the valley, and the hill-tops and the plain were alive with the mass of human figures, and the "Amens" of half the people echoed from one side to the "Amens" on the other. Ah, the hills had heard them; and to-day they stood as the Lord's witnesses. The Levites, or Joshua, had said, "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination to the Lord"—and from Ebal sounded the threatening "Amen!" and Gerizim heard it. My eyes filled with tears. The people had said it, and the hills had witnessed it, and the Lord had done it! I turned to the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy. "Ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the Lord thy God. . . . And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; . . . And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest; but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind." It is all come true. Ebal and Gerizim are there yet, but the

people are gone; and long they have been tasting the curse which their fathers spoke. Then my eye came back to the little pile of stones which mark the site of Jacob's well, and I lost myself in those times still further back; and then wondered over the thought how Jesus sat there, one December day, and talked to the woman who came to draw water. Then perhaps the ruin of the old Samaritan temple was still to be seen on Gerizim; and the plain was lying bare and still, as it looked to-day. How pretty it was! without a break of house or hedge; level and still; only the gray olive-trees here and there. The sun was getting up in the sky, and our servants began to make a stir. Then Uncle Sam came out; and we talked till breakfast was ready.

After breakfast we were going to the town. So our steeds were saddled and we set off, more happy than it is possible to say. And every foot of the way seemed to increase our delight. Even passing through the corn-fields at the entrance of the valley, we were interested in the different travellers we met on the way; business travellers almost exclusively; but it seemed there was a good deal of business going on. Lines of laden camels went past us; they carried cotton-bales. Asses laden with firewood were going the other way, to the city; people singly and in groups were moving in both directions, some of them armed to the teeth; riders were springing about on wild horses.

"Nablous seems to be a stirring place," Dan remarked.

"Quite. Soap, cotton and oil, and leather water-skins, make it lively."

We passed on, and came next among the fruit orchards. The olives with their mistletoe hangings; then figs, pomegranates, mulberries, and palms. The mountain sides meanwhile were rocky and rather stern, I thought. So they should be! But the hollows in the sides of Gerizim were grown with fruit-trees, such as I have mentioned, with oranges, almonds, and peaches besides. Then we came to the city, and wound about in its streets. I must say they were very disagreeable. Narrow and dirty, and dark, from the houses being built so as to project over them.

The only thing I liked was the bazaars. Those were amusing. We bought fruit and vegetables, and lingered and looked; for the throng of buyers and sellers was a strange sight to us; and there were a great many Turkish soldiers. Turkish soldiers here in Shechem! The confusion was too great at last; we got away to another bazaar where we found European things and beautiful cloths and jackets from Damascus and Aleppo; and Uncle Sam bought me a Turkish pipe and Priscilla an amber bracelet from Hebron. From this bazaar we went out into an old khan, a real Eastern khan. The enclosure round the court was two stories high. We got up to the roof of this, from which we had a good view. However, we would not linger there; but went on to climb Mount Gerizim. A pretty stiff climb it was; and the top of the hill seemed very wild and lonely. We made our way on towards the east end, till we came to the ruins which are supposed to be those of a Roman fortress.

Here we dismounted, spread carpets, and took our lunch. What a view we had! The day was warm and clear, and away, away off in the north, we saw the white head of Mount Hermon, while below us, far down, lay the delicious little plain of Mukhna.

"Do you suppose Jacob bought all the plain, Uncle Sam?"

"Impossible to say, Tiny; no title-deeds are to show."

"He must, I should think," said Dan, "or he would not have sent his flocks to pasture here."

"Less than the whole would do for his encampment and for digging the well. The well is the great thing," Uncle Sam said.

"Think of the times the plain and the valley have been filled with the gatherings of the tribes," said I. "When the blessings and cursings were spoken; and when Joshua made a covenant with the people and set up the stone under the oak; the stone and the oak are both gone together. And when Abimelech and Gaal fought there, and when the people stoned Adoram. There are stones enough!"

"What is that water away off to the west?" Priscilla asked. "Is it the Mediterranean?"

"Certainly. You can trace the shore from Carmel down —I don't know how far—to the Philistine plain, and I should think, nearly to the lower end of it."

"And those hills on the east are the hills of Moab?"

"The same range; Moab is further south; we look here from Bashan and Gilead down to Moab."

"And all these smaller hills around us—what are they?"

"The hills of Ephraim. In the north yonder rises the high ground of Galilee. Far over there to the west is Cæsarea, yonder, do you see? and Joppa *there*, farther down. The country is richer and fairer here than the barren tract of Judah and Benjamin; growing richer as you go north. These fruitful little plains become more frequent, and springs and streams grow abundant."

"Rehoboam lost it all by his folly," said Liph.

"Nay. His father lost it by his disobedience."

"Hard lines for Rehoboam."

"If you please. But no one in this world can sin without hurting others. It is the constitution of things."

"But Rehoboam had a *right* to the crown, sir."

"Had he? Where did he get it?"

"He was Solomon's son."

"How did that give him a right?"

"Why, by the law, sir."

"What law? You forget. God was the only King of Israel. In answer to their rebellious desire He gave them a mortal prince to reign over them; but such a prince was always 'the Lord's Anointed;' appointed by Him, and ruling under Him. No man had any rights in the matter. God chose Saul, and dispossessed him; chose David, and for David's sake promised that his royal line should never die. So when Solomon disobeyed, the Lord kept one tribe, in effect two, for his successors; so maintaining 'a light' for David, as He had promised; 1 Kings xi. 36. Furthermore, children,' notice verse 39 of that same chapter."

"What does it mean?"

"See the 89th Psalm, and read from the 8th verse to the 37th.—Who is His 'first born, higher than the kings of the earth,' whom God 'will make to endure for ever, and His throne as the days of heaven'?"

"Why, that is Christ," I cried.

"Certainly. In Him come all the promises to their utmost fulfilment; meanwhile, Rehoboam was just keeping the 'light of David' in Jerusalem."

"Rehoboam was going to fight for it," said Dan. "The first thing he did when he got home was to gather a pretty big army."

"He minded the prophet, though, that forbade him," said I.

"Or the people did," said Uncle Sam. "'*They* hearkened to the word of the Lord,' and scattered to their homes again; but there was never peace between the two kings from that time. Jeroboam made Shechem his capital; and then set up the golden calves at the two extremities of his kingdom, to prevent his people from going to the yearly worship at Jerusalem. So he destroyed *his* prospects, by attempting to secure them against the word of the Lord. He made priests of the lowest of the people; and all Israel was turned aside from the worship of God and followed a gilded idolatry."

"How 'gilded,' Uncle Sam?"

"In that it kept the name of worshipping Jehovah, while it went flat against His commands."

"But, sir," said Liph, "don't you think Jeroboam acted according to a wise policy?"

"Judging from its results, what do *you* think?"

"You cannot always judge of a policy, sir, by its results, can you?"

"Always, when the results are uniform. From the beginning of the world, the results of disobeying God have been disastrous. In this case they were strikingly so. Three years after Jeroboam's death, there was not one of his family left upon the face of the earth."

"Well, Uncle Sam, Rehoboam did not behave very well either," said I.

"What likelihood that he would, when his mother was Naamah the Ammonitess?"

"Why is her name given?"

"The name of the king's mother is given in the case of every one of the kings of Judah. The queen mother was an important personage; she had a great deal of influence upon affairs, both indirectly and directly we must assume. Naamah is mentioned again in the end of the chapter."

"But we do not know that she did any harm to Rehoboam," Liph said.

"Well," said Uncle Sam, "I think we do. What is her name mentioned for? Rehoboam's evil doing is detailed, and then it is repeated, that Naamah was his mother. No doubt she went worshipping to the sanctuary of Mileom, the abomination of the Ammonites, which Solomon had built for her; and young Rehoboam might well have her to thank for some of the confusion in his mind between right and wrong."

"His father too," said I.

"Yes, and his father. Rehoboam carried on what Solomon began. If the Ammonites and the Moabites and the Sidonians had their idolatrous worship suffered in Jerusalem, why should it not be suffered elsewhere in the land? So it was. Read 1 Kings xiv. 22, 23, Tiny."

"What are 'high places'?"

"Places of worship upon the tops of hills. Often there was a sanctuary built beside the altar. These 'high places' were not for idols, but for the worship of Jehovah; and they were in use before the temple was built. See chap. iii. 2, 3. People thought they got nearer to God on the top of high hills."

"Why was it wrong, then?" Dan asked.

"Read Leviticus xvii. 1–9. It was against the law. When Solomon came to the throne, however, the tabernacle had ceased to be the only gathering place; the ark had been taken away, and was lodged under a tent in Jerusalem."

"Where was the tabernacle, then?"

"On the high place at Gibeon. That was then 'the

great high place.' There was the brazen altar of sacrifice still. The ark itself was in Jerusalem, with a separate altar and worship. The house of the Lord was not built; and so 'high places' were multiplied. But they were utterly forbidden."

"Images were forbidden too," said I. "What images would these be?—idols?"

"No. They were not properly images, but stones set up by the side of the altars as monuments. They were in honour of the true God at first. But the Canaanites set up such stones beside Baal's altars on their 'high places,' and so you see there would come to be a confounding of the one worship with the other. The 'groves' were not plantations of trees, though such plantations were greatly favoured and used by idolaters as scenes of their heathen rites and festivities. These 'groves' were really wooden idols of Asherah or Astarte; shapeless wooden blocks or pillars, probably, set up beside Baal's altars; Diana of the Ephesians seems to have been much such a deity. Astarte was the goddess of nature; a deification of 'Mother Nature.'"

"Then why does it say 'groves,' when they were not groves?"

"A mistake of King James's translators, who did not know what the word meant. See 2 Kings xxi. 7—1 Kings xvi. 33—2 Kings xvii. 16. Astarte was a Phœnician goddess, and, like Baal, very widely worshipped.

"So now we can imagine the condition of the land. Altars on hill-tops, for sacrificing to the Lord; and 'under every green tree' statues of heathen deities set up, and thickets of trees surrounding other altars; the smoke of incense and of burning sacrifices offered to devils, curling up from all the green hills of Judah, and the voice of song and revelry that had no sacredness nor purity in it, heard all through the land."

"Well, sir, but the worship was carried on regularly in the Temple, was it not?"

"Yes."

"Then had not these other people, who worshipped idols,

a right to their own belief? I suppose they knew no better."

"These 'other people' were Israelites—the Lord's own people, gone astray through the hardness of their own hearts. And in the second place, they did know better. And in the third place, no one has a right to do wrong, or even to believe wrong; supposing that better light is within his reach."

"Why do you say that they sacrificed to devils, Uncle Sam? They did not mean that, did they?"

"It is not I that say it, Prissy. See Deut. xxxii. 17, and Ps. cvi. 37. 'They sacrificed to devils.' True in two ways. The gods they imagined were devils in character. And, in yielding to temptation, they were really serving and honouring Satan and his ministers. At that time, children, you must fancy the surface of country in its highest state of cultivation and beauty. All the old terraces we have wondered at were then in repair; the hills which look so bleak and bare now were hung thick from top to bottom with fruit; corn-fields were in the bottom of the valleys, olive groves, fig orchards, lined the sides of them, and the higher grounds were purple with grapes. Now we see the grey limestone everywhere; then it was one flush of vegetation, rich with fruit or golden with corn. The land was crowded with inhabitants, and every man sat under his own vine and fig-tree, and had enough. More than enough, for Solomon paid Hiram king of Tyre for his builders, and his timber with wheat and barley and wine and oil."

"Look at the land now, and think of it!" said Dan.

"How lovely it must have been!" said Priscilla.

"In 2 Chronicles xi.," said Dan, "the first thing that is told of Rehoboam, after his giving up the plan of fighting with Jeroboam, is his building 'cities for defence;' was that to protect him against his northern neighbour?"

"The fortresses were not in that quarter. The line of them stretched rather along the west and south-west."

"What was he afraid of on that side?"

"Even Israel's old great enemy—Egypt. You must

remember, Egypt was in alliance, not with the house of David now but with its rivals. A new Pharaoh was on the throne, who knew not Solomon; that is, he belonged to another dynasty from the one which had given an Egyptian princess to Palestine. Everything was to be feared on that side. So Rehoboam set about building defences."

"He was wise in that, at least," said Liph.

"Worldly wisdom!" said Uncle Sam. "Israel's safety was never in stone and mortar, or in men and horses. Rehoboam was not a believer, and he forgot that."

"But, sir, mustn't we use means?" Dan asked.

"Humph!—yes, in certain things we must; the means God has appointed. But the Lord Himself is Israel's help in time of trouble, and 'there is no king saved by the multitude of a host.' 'O Israel, trust thou in the Lord; He is their help and their shield!' Rehoboam's fortresses did him no good."

"Is this Bethlehem in verse 6, the one that we know?"

"The same, six miles south of Jerusalem."

"He built fifteen of these fortresses," said Dan.

"Look at your maps. Tekoa was some six miles south of Bethlehem; the ruins of the place are in plenty now. Beth-zur, a little farther still to the south. Shoco is now Shuweike, not so far off, and towards the south-west. Adullam was in the hill country bordering the plain, we do not know just where. Gath was a Philistine city in the plain; David had taken it from the Philistines, 1 Chron. xviii. 1, but it had its own king; 1 Kings ii. 39.

"Then Mareshah is the ruin Marash, down here, between Hebron and the plain. Ziph was hereabout, a little east of Hebron; there are ruins that still go by the name. Adoraim is perhaps Dura, here, a little west of Hebron. Lachish between Gaza and Hebron, where Um Lakis now is. Azekah was near Shoco, down in the west, in or by the valley of Elah, where David fought Goliath; the Philistine's camp at that memorable time was between Shoco and Azekah. Zorah was in the same neighbourhood, on the western end of a ridge which sets westward towards the

plain; that was Samson's birthplace, you know. Aijalon, in the edge of the plain, farther north, west of Gibeon; over that valley it was that the moon stood still when Joshua fought the five kings and chased them down into the plain from Beth-horon. Hebron you know well enough."

"Why we seem to know them all," cried Priscilla; "and I thought they were just a string of names."

"Uncle Sam, I wish we could go and see them all."

"So we will, Tiny, if we do not get short of time."

"All those fortresses ought to have made Rehoboam strong," said Liph.

"So I suppose was the king's own opinion; for it is written, 2 Chron. xii. 1, that when he 'had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord.' It does not agree with human nature to feel strong."

"Why not?"

"Then they forsake their Strength."

"At any rate, he did his work thoroughly," said Liph. "It says, he put officers and provisions and arms in all his fortresses, and 'made them exceeding strong.'"

"Yes, but go on," said Uncle Sam. "You read next of a still better strengthening of Rehoboam's kingdom. Read verses 13–17. Jeroboam's calf-worship had driven out of his kingdom a great many good and true men. The priests and Levites with one accord forsook their homes, their cities, and lands, and went over to Judah. So with every one in the ten tribes who remained loyal to Jehovah; he went up to Jerusalem to worship, and abode there."

"What were the 'suburbs' of the Levites?"

"See Numbers xxxv. 1–4. The priests and Levites, you know, had no portion in the land. The Lord was their portion; and they lived from the offerings brought. But they had cities to dwell in, and grounds about the cities for their cattle."

"Then, Uncle Sam, what does verse 15 mean? 'The devils and the calves,'—what is that?"

"Golden calves could not represent Israel's God; they were the resort and invention of unbelief and disobedience

which serves the devil; and the objects and forms of their reverence are called here and elsewhere 'demons.'"

"So all these good people coming into the kingdom strengthened it, I suppose, better than fortresses," said Dan

"And they helped to keep things straight for a while. Three years went by before Rehoboam and all Judah openly forsook the Lord, as we read in 1 Kings xiv. 22. Before the Chronicle tells us of this, it mentions certain royal marriages. Mahalath was a daughter of a son of David, of whom we know nothing, and of Abihail, David's niece."

"I thought Rehoboam married both those women."

"No; verse 19 goes on—'And *she* bore children.'—Then the other wife mentioned was a granddaughter of Absalom; must have been a daughter of his only daughter Tamar (see 2 Sam. xiv. 27) for Absalom left no sons, and if Tamar was still living she was far too old for Rehoboam. In 2 Chron. xiii. 2 you see she had married Uriel of Gibeah. Her name is spelt there a little differently."

"Of what use is it to us to know that, Uncle Sam? I don't see."

"Do not rashly conclude that there is no use where you do not immediately see it."

"No, sir; but what use is it?"

"Perhaps, to let us know with what exactness all these details were noted and recorded. And Maachah was the mother of Abijam, whom Rehoboam appointed to be his successor."

"Why did he send all the rest of his sons away from him?" Liph asked. "Verse 23 says he did."

"And says he did wisely. He scattered them about in the fortresses, giving them posts of command and trust, giving them something to do; and so keeping them apart and away from opportunity of conspiracies and trouble-making at court."

"Yes," said Liph. "I have a respect for Rehoboam."

"But he forsook the Lord," said Priscilla.

"And all Israel with him. So then came the punishment

swift and sore. The king of Egypt invaded Judah with a terrible army; Rehoboam's fenced cities fell, one after another, and Jerusalem was left bare. Then was seen a strange sight, the Egyptian army with its standards lying on the heights about the city."

"What was an Egyptian army like?"

"Not a wild, disorganised host. Egypt had long been a civilised nation, highly advanced in arts, if not in sciences. However, they had no gunpowder. The bulk of the army were archers, fighting on foot and in chariots. Then there was heavy infantry, armed with swords, spears, javelins, battle-axes, slings and maces, one or the other; all carrying shields; and with Shishak were also sixty thousand horsemen. Every company had its own standard. They were no doubt a brilliant and imposing spectacle; and very dreadful to Judah and Jerusalem."

"Without guns, how did they take those strong fortresses?"

"The monuments show. First, under cover of a storm of arrows, they would apply scaling ladders, rush up to the battlements, throw down the defenders, and take the place by might of hand. If that would not do, for the Jews were obstinate fighters, they pushed up battering rams to the walls, under cover of *testudos*. The testudo was a framework of wood covered with leather or skins, probably large enough to shelter several men. If they could break a passage in the walls, well and good; if not, then, under shelter of the testudos, companies of miners were set to work to undermine them. Or sometimes they made their attack upon the gates, trying to hew them or break them in. In all these approaches to the ramparts of a fortified town the attackers covered their heads with their shields; so that, Mr. Wilkinson says, in the sculptures, the figure of the king advancing at the head of his army with his shield before him is meant to signify that the place was taken by storm. Look at Isaiah xxxvii. 33."

"'Thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there,

nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it.' Ah, but the Lord did not help Rehoboam as He did Hezekiah!"

"He did help him, though. When the time of extreme need came, and the king and princes were perhaps in council debating, then came the prophet with his message. And king and princes confessed their sin and humbled themselves; so the Lord gave them deliverance."

"What deliverance?" said Liph.

"He did not destroy them."

"Might as well," said Liph.

"Oh no!" I said. "But Uncle Sam, did Shishak get into the city?"

"It seems so, Tiny. 'He took away all;' that is not the expression which would be used for the payment of a bribe to buy him off. He plundered the treasures of the house of the Lord; and the treasures of the king's house. The golden candlesticks which Solomon had made, ten of them; and the ten golden tables, and the hundred golden wine-flagons for the pouring out libations of wine; and the snuffers and the spoons and the censers; all these glories of the temple I suppose Shishak carried to Egypt. In the palace called the house of the forest of Lebanon hung Solomon's golden shields, and they went; and no doubt all the gold drinking vessels and others of the palace. We do not hear anything about the gold and ivory throne; I should think it would have tempted the conqueror."

"And Rehoboam made brazen shields to supply their place!" said Priscilla. "That was poor comfort."

"Ay! The day of the golden shields was gone," said Uncle Sam. "And it never came back."

"What does the word mean in verse 12, 'Also in Judah things went well'?"

"Should be rendered—'Also in Judah there were good things.' Not only the king humbled himself; but there were good and faithful people in the land; men who feared the Lord and served Him, and deplored the evils that were so rife."

I went on with the next verse, "'So King Rehoboam strengthened himself in Judah.' I should have thought it was *weakened* himself, rather."

"The kingdom was sadly weakened. Fortresses destroyed or broken, with how much of the cruelty then incident to warfare the brief history does not tell; hearts dismayed and dispirited; treasures of gold and silver taken away. But after this time there came a gradual recovery. Rehoboam grew in measure strong again. Shishak went back to his own country in triumph and wrote his victories in stone. I have stood in what was once the court of a great hall of his building. One great beautiful pillar was still erect, with the peculiar graceful Egyptian capital. Near by lay other pillars fallen down; the round blocks of which they had been built lying against one another still, like a fallen house of cards. In front of me was the crumbling ruin of an enormous gateway or pylon; and away in the distance, between walls of hieroglyphics, I could see an obelisk standing up into the sky; but all around was heaps of ruins. On a wall near by yet preserved, is the record of Shishak's triumphs in Judea."

"Did you see it?"

"Certainly. There is a row of prisoners, led in a string by the Egyptian deity Ammon, and another led by Shishak; their hands tied behind them. Certain signs show that a number of these figures represent conquered cities."

"Rehoboam's fortresses!"

"A great many of the names have been made out to be those of cities in Judah. Over a hundred names have been deciphered, or supposed to be deciphered."

"And so Shishak's glory did not last," said I.

"Rehoboam's repentance did not," said Dan.

"No. He did not 'fix his heart to seek the Lord.' But take notice, children. Shishak's kingdom and glory are indeed gone, without recall or recovery; but the 'light' promised to David's house has never died. And now the Light of all lights, come to fulfil all the promises in Himself, holds the throne of David, and will hold it for ever."

"Not in Jerusalem, sir," said Liph.

"Over the true Israel, though. And Jerusalem will yet be built in its splendour; and the promised land conquered from the unholy powers that have it now. As David conquered the typical city from the Jebusites."

"And will it be made splendid, sir?"

"Ay, boy. The foundations of the wall will be precious stones; and every several gate one pearl; and the streets of it pure gold, as it were transparent glass. But we must go home, children."

CHAPTER V.

THE FIGHT OF FAITH.

I WAS thinking, all the way down the mountain and through the valley, I was thinking of the worthies who had figured there. I imagined Jotham shouting from the height of Gerizim and telling his fable; and Abimelech reigning, and Gaal fighting; and Joshua long before that, and Jacob; and the time when Jeroboam made Shechem his capital. Then as we rode down the valley through the orchards and olive-groves and cornfields, and came out towards Jacob's well and saw our tents, the thought of One other who had been there seemed to fill the place. He had brought in a new order of things, and set up a kingdom which displaced the others and will displace all others; yet David's kingdom too. I rode home in a delightful dream; till we dismounted, and I recollected that I was very hungry. Indeed it was late, and Mustapha had our supper, or dinner, all ready; and we gathered round it in great spirits; full of all we had seen.

"It must have been hard for Rehoboam to give up this beautiful country of Ephraim," said Dan.

"And all that lies north of it," added Liph. "The great plain of Esdraelon, just think, and Mount Carmel, and the hills of Galilee, and Gilead."

"He did not make up his mind to it," said my uncle. "There was war, or at least unpeace, between the two kingdoms for many a day."

"Was Abijah a good man?" Priscilla asked.

"We will consider that subject presently, after we have done with our cups of tea," said my uncle.

"Why, no, he wasn't," said Dan. "It says in Kings that he wasn't. 'He walked in all the sins of his father.'"

"But he made such a beautiful address to the men of Israel."

"Words don't count," said Dan.

"But the Lord gave him the victory."

"Let us take things regularly," said Uncle Sam. "Fetch your Bibles, children. Not too tired, Tiny? Come here and let me put my arm round you. Now, boys, go on."

"Well, sir. In 2 Chron. xiii. 2, his mother's name is changed."

"Only a mistake of spelling. She was Maachah, the granddaughter of Absalom, and as queen mother held a very important position, not only in this reign but in the next, which position she abused. Go on."

"How do you know she abused it, sir?"

"You will find out. What next?"

"The next thing is, that the book of Kings says nothing about this war."

"It says that the two kingdoms were always in a hostile attitude towards each other; there was always war."

"Why does the book of Chronicles tell though in particular about this fight, and the book of Kings not a word?"

"Well, there is a reason. The compiler of the books of the Kings aims just to give the facts of history. The author of the books of Chronicles gives indeed the same history, but with a choice of facts which shall specially show *why* the fortunes of Judah went up or down; how that all that happened to them was the exact fulfilling of God's covenant promises and threatenings, and came as they kept or broke that covenant."

"The Kingdom of Judah——," said Liph.

"Yes. The book is specially occupied with that, after the division."

"Then next, Uncle Sam, how happened this particular fight. Who began the quarrel this time?"

"The quarrel was permanent. As to who was the immediate aggressor I do not know. Only the fact that Jeroboam had twice Abijah's force, inclines one to think that it must have been he."

"Do you suppose they really had such enormous armies?" asked Liph.

"Look at 2 Sam. xxiv. 9. In the census taken by David, you see the fighting men of Israel are reckoned at precisely this figure; while Judah is rated even higher."

"Uncle Sam," said I, "couldn't we go to Mount Zemaraim?"

"If we only knew where it was, Tiny, we *would* go there. But we do not know. It was in Mount Ephraim somewhere, or in the mountains of Ephraim."

"Next I want to know," I went on, "how could Abijah, if he was a wicked king, make such a speech? and how came the Lord to deliver him?"

"A wicked man may speak a true word; and that did Abijah on this occasion. He told the truth according to facts."

"What facts?"

"Read his speech. All the facts. The kingdom had been given to David irreversibly; Jeroboam was a rebel, and Israel with him, against the Lord's Anointed. They had cast out the priests, the sons of Aaron, and made priests of common people; any one who could bring the sacrifices prescribed at a priest's consecration. They had forsaken the Lord and His worship. And Judah had kept to both."

"But I thought all Judah was full of idolatry," said I.

"Yes, it was; and yet the Temple worship had been maintained, was maintained regularly in all its details; and the priests the sons of Aaron ministered; and many a true heart among them and among the people loved where they served. Formally, Judah as a nation had not cast off their God; formally, as a nation, that was what Israel had done."

"But, sir," said Liph, "the calves which Jeroboam set up were dedicated to Jehovah."

"Doubtless he would have had it so, but it could not be. You cannot serve God by disobeying Him. The calves were flat disobedience and unbelief, and really were but an accommodation of Baal worship. Israel had forsaken the Lord utterly. Judah had not."

"I begin to understand," said Priscilla. "I see, that makes a great difference."

"And so Abijah made the most of it in his speech," said Dan.

"Of course he made the most of it!" said Liph. "He was bold."

"We learn in 1 Kings xv. 15, that Abijah himself made offerings to the house of the Lord; though his service was not of the heart."

"But there are things I do not understand," I said. "What is a covenant of salt?"

"You know, among the Greeks of old, and the Arabs of all time, a treaty or covenant was ratified and sealed by the parties eating bread and salt together."

"But *the Lord* gave the kingdom to David" (2 Chron. xiii. 5).

"By such a covenant; irrevocable, sacred. Look at Lev. ii. 13."

"'With all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.' Why, Uncle Sam?"

"Salt keeps from decay and corruption, and salt is the seal of a bond between man and man; and so, in this as in many other things, the Lord uses human terms and ideas to give His own meaning."

"How was Rehoboam young and tender-hearted, when he refused the people's petition, I should like to know?" inquired Dan. "I should say he was a truculent fellow and nothing tender about him."

"Not *tender-hearted* so much as *faint-hearted* is meant by the words; weak of purpose, and inexperienced. But I agree with you, the description does not fit. Abijah is making out a case."

"Well, what are the trumpets in verse 12?" said I.

"Don't you know? Read Num. x. 1-10. Two sacred silver trumpets Moses had been directed to make, for solemn use. A blast of them was the signal for the assembling of the congregation. The blast from one only, was for a gathering of the princes; the rulers and officers. The

sounding of an alarm was the order for the marching of the camps, each in turn, as the alarm was sounded again and again. And in war, in time of need before the enemy, the alarm blown with the trumpets was a solemn outcry of appeal to God the 'sword of their excellency,' to fight for them. The promise you see in verse 9 of that chapter in Numbers."

"'Ye shall be remembered and ye shall be saved,'" said I. "Oh, how beautiful! And Abijah had reason."

"But in the fifteenth verse," said Priscilla, "it says that 'the men of Judah gave a shout'—what for? That was before the victory was given them."

"Yes," said Dan. "How was that? The battle was before and behind them. Was it a shout of fear? or to encourage themselves? or to frighten the enemy?"

"None of the three. It was just as the priests had sounded the appeal alarm on the trumpets, and Judah's shout was the triumph of faith. You don't get a shout out of the throats of half-hearted or desponding people. When the trumpets sounded the appeal to God, they knew the Lord would hear. Don't you know that 'faith is the substance of things hoped for?' It is as good as having the things. It *has* them. So Judah shouted. So Israel shouted before Jericho, and the walls fell down. No walls that were ever built will stand that shout."

"'And the children of Judah prevailed *because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers.*' So they did rely upon Him. And think what odds!"

"No matter what the odds are," said Uncle Sam. "'The horse is prepared against the day of battle; but *safety* is of the Lord.'"

"Then you would not prepare the horses, sir?" said Liph.

"I would do all I could."

"What use, sir, if it is of no use?"

"It is of use."

"How can it be, as you say?"

"Because I find that in every case God has given me my

part to do; and my part He will not do for me. And though my part be of no use without His, yet He does not choose to dispense with it. Do you think, if a farmer puts no seed in the ground, the Lord will give him corn?"

"It is queer," said Liph.

"Never mind. It is the fact. In everything, of all affairs of life, faith will do its best; and not trust to it."

"Judah made cruel work with Israel that time," Liph went on.

"The world has never been very merciful on the battle-field. And the Israelites were ever hard fighters. The result of this victory was ten years of peace. Jeroboam never could lift up his head again, and he died a few years later, two years after Abijah. The city Bethel, with others, also fell into Abijah's hands. The others have not been identified with certainty."

"Why does it say always where the king was buried?"

"The Orientals make much of that. The family burying-place is sacred. To bring a stranger's remains into it is the highest honour to him; for one of the family to be denied burial with his own, on the other hand, is dire misfortune and disgrace."

"When did all this happen, Uncle Sam?"

"In the tenth century before Christ."

"But I mean—in what time of the world, of the world's history?"

"You ought to know, Dan. Three hundred years before Rome was built."

"It is very far back indeed," said I. "Well, Uncle Sam, now comes Asa's good, long reign of forty-one years. He was a reformer."

"Ay," said Uncle Sam; "and then needed to be reformed himself. He is a fine instance to show of what poor stuff humanity is made. However, let us study him. Yes, he began with reforms, thorough and hearty. The altars of strange gods, the high places of Baal worship, the wooden images or pillars or tree stumps sacred to Astarte or Ashterath, he cleared them all out of the land. The stone

monuments set up for Baal were thrown down or taken away; the 'images' or 'sun images' mentioned in verse 5; and by command of the king, no worship was permitted in his dominions save the worship of Jehovah alone."

"Isn't that illiberal, Uncle Sam?"

"Certainly, Liph; if by 'illiberal' you mean intolerant of other religions."

"Isn't that illiberal?"

"Ought Truth to be liberal towards Falsehood?"

"But how is one to know when he has the truth?"

"God knows, at least, Liph; and He says that He will be gentle with the ignorant; but that he who knows his master's will and does it not, shall be punished with many stripes. Israel knew. They couldn't plead ignorance. The king was the head of the nation, and if he did not purify it he simply led it to destruction."

"But, sir, every civilised nation gives liberty of conscience now, to everybody."

"God does not. And Israel was His people, you must remember; His covenant people; in a way that no people on earth is now. And alas for them! For the word is, 'The nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee, shall perish' (Isa. lx. 12). Let us go on with Asa. It was well with him and with Israel in those days, for 'the Lord had given him rest.' So they improved the time to put the country again in a defended and fortified condition. 'They built and prospered.' And the people was thriving and numerous, as appears from the number of able-bodied warriors that Asa could bring into the field."

"And yet they were not enough," said I. "Who was Zerah the Ethiopian?"

"Some take him to have been Osorchon I. king of Egypt; another opinion makes him an Ethiopian king, not Egyptian."

"Well, it *says* Ethiopian."

"Cushite. His fleeing host certainly took the way to Egypt; but Zerah is supposed to have come through that country as a conqueror or as a marauder at least. It does

not matter. The thing is, the fight of faith and the consequent victory."

"Sir, they fought with their spears and their swords too, didn't they? Asa, I mean, and his men?"

"No doubt; but they did not trust to their weapons. 'I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me,'—David sang once; and it is the Christian's cry of victory."

"I do not understand it, sir."

"Will you read Ps. xxxiii. 16–18."

Liph read—"Then why have an army at all, sir? or a horse, or a sword, or anything?"

"Because it is the Lord's way upon earth to work in the use of means. Obedience uses the means, and faith looks to the Lord. So Asa and his people did; and see the results. They loaded themselves with booty. They ravaged the cities of the Philistines which had taken part with the enemy; and came back to Jerusalem not only victorious, but with heaps of riches; riches of the Cushite host, riches of the Philistine cities, and herds of cattle and sheep besides."

"Where was the fight, Uncle Sam?"

"Mareshah was one of the places Abijah had fortified and Shishak had broken down. Probably Asa had restored the fortifications; walls and towers, and gates and bars, according to the system of defence of those days. It was between Hebron and Gaza, in the hill country."

"Couldn't we go there?"

"Why, yes, we could. It would give you a sight of a good deal of the country. Yes, we can go straight there, before taking up our quarters on the Mount of Olives again."

This plan was decided upon. We stayed another day yet where we were, to become more thoroughly familiar with the place. The next morning we broke camp and went southwards again.

We travelled slowly, as need was on my account. Two days brought us to Jerusalem. The journey from here was

on new ground, and we were all in a state of excitement. We set off betimes, passed the Russian Convent of the Cross a mile and a half beyond the city, and came into the "Valley of Roses." Here the name was more than the reality; though the bottom of the valley, which is called the *Wady el Werd*, is planted with rose-bushes for the manufacture of rose water. Then we got among groves and corn-fields; but as we went farther the ground grew rougher, and the sides of the valley began to be terraced. It looked as if grain had been planted in flower beds. After a while we came to a pretty fountain. It was built up, in a sort of arch of mason-work, with pilasters; and broken down stones and columns lay about and in the neighbourhood. We were on the old road to Gaza, down which the eunuch was driving from Jerusalem, reading the book of Isaiah, when Philip came to him. We stopped to rest and read the story, and thought, certainly the meeting must have taken place down in the plain somewhere, and that therefore this could not be Philip's fountain, as the monks say it is. Not a great way beyond the fountain we passed a village and turned into another valley. We saw some of the people; very wild-looking, and armed as if they had nothing to do but fight. I was glad to get out of sight of them.

The country seemed to me almost as wild as the people. We went turning and winding among the hills, gradually working our way down to the lower ground. Ruins were on every hand, sometimes not quite deserted, and the names were terribly interesting, as names of old cities of Judah. All waste and barren and desert now; just a few trees clustering around the groups of houses; but we could see by the old terraces what once the land had been, when the hills were hung with fruit and the bottoms filled with corn-fields and gardens. Now and then at a turn we got a lovely view through an opening in the hills, reaching down far off and across country, till it ended in the Great Sea, the Mediterranean. This is the "hill-country of Judea," Uncle Sam said; the intermediate region between the high rocky backbone of the land and the level, low seaside plain. In

spring it is covered with grass and perfectly brilliant with flowers. I wished we could have seen the flowers. Prissy and I are going to beg Uncle Sam to stay all winter.

At last we got to a village where we resolved to stay all night. Of course not *in* the village; we pitched our camp near it, on the same rocky ridge, from which we had a most beautiful view. At first I could not look at it, I was so tired; but after I had rested and we had dined, we took our places to talk. Uncle Sam had been there before and could tell us the points of the view.

There was the great plain in the distance. Nearer there were the hills of Judah breaking down into the plain. In one direction, northerly, we could see a bit of the great valley in which lies the town of Bethshemesh, a little before it enters the plain; Bethshemesh, to which the kine drew the ark. Then just to the south of us lay Wady es Sunt, the valley of Elah, where David met Goliath. We could see Shocoh where the Philistines were encamped, and in the north, Samson's birthplace Zorah, and Timnath, where he went for his wife.

"What a thing it is to have history all round you," Dan said.

The next day we rode down the Valley of Elah, making a circuit to see several places; and then through a succession of valleys and across a succession of ridges to get to Beit-jibrin. We could see as we passed the openings to the caves which were all about here in the limestone hills. The very ground sometimes gave a sound as we rode over it which told that it was hollow. The weather was lovely; that was what we had to counterbalance the dried-up state of everything.

Our breakfast next morning was taken in high spirits. It was of course in the open air, and our tents were pitched near the ruins of an old castle which is crumbling away at one end of the village of Beit-jibrin. The question was debated, whether we would examine the ruins first, or the caves; we all declared for the caves.

But how shall I describe these? To get to them we went

a little way up a valley which comes down from the south; a nice valley with green grass and olive-trees, and the rocky sides of it are not high at all. One could not expect anything. However, the surprise was the greater. We were taken through a wide passage into a range of beautiful rooms cut in the rock. They were lofty and arched, with smooth cut walls, and had openings at the top for light. From one to another we went; there seemed no end. One room was near a hundred feet long, with an ornamental border cut along the walls ten feet from the floor. After we had looked and wondered a while, our guide took us across the valley to a range of caverns in the opposite ridge. I think the whole inside of the ridge must have been hollowed out. Rooms and rooms; there was no getting through them all. Some were sixty feet high, and more than that in breadth.

We went on then up the valley for about a mile more, passing the openings to more caves on our way. About a mile up the valley were two strange things. One was the ruins of a church; the other, a very queer little hill; *tell* they call it here. One end of the church is all that is left standing, but there are foundations and vaults, and windows in them. I was full of curiosity, but Uncle Sam would not talk. "Look now, and talk by and by," he said. The tell is near the church, opposite, on the other side of the valley. It is so regular in form that one cannot believe it is natural, and cut off flat on the top. There are remains of foundations on the sides of it, and tombs excavated in the rock at the foot. We went into one. I shall never forget it. The cutting ran fifty feet into the hill, and was as wide as a good-sized room; and along the sides were niches prepared for the bodies that once had lain there. And inside the hill there were besides some more of those sculptured dwelling-places for the living. We had to have candles lit to examine them. To get to them, we went first into a pit full of briar bushes, and from that by a narrow, very disagreeable passage, into the rooms. There were a great many of the rooms, with irregular passages

running from one to another; all connected; and they must have taken up the whole inside of the hill. Some of them, oddest of all, had the entrance near the top, and a stairway cut in the rock went winding along the wall to the bottom. We could only see a few, after all, and leave a great many unvisited. Indeed I had done as much as I could do, and was quite tired out when we got back to camp.

CHAPTER VI.

ASA AND ZERAH.

I LAY down on my bed and rested. The door of the tent was open, and I could look out upon the valley and the hills, and see a little bit of the old castle wall. I lost myself in wondering how it was and what it was in King's Asa's time. Ah, then the land was full of people; and there were busy towns where now the ruins are grey and tumble-down; and the hills and the valleys were not dry and barren, but "the valleys were covered over with corn;" the valley sides were grey with olives bearing their rich fruit; and the rocky terraces were purple with the clusters of the grape. It was bright and bustling and merry with "the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride." Now, how sad and desolate and wild. And yet it was the same air of Palestine blowing upon me; and they were Judah's hills which were around me; and I thought of the prophet's cry,—"O Israel, return unto the Lord; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity!"

With the tears on my eyelashes, I think I fell asleep; and knew nothing more till I was called to dinner. And never did stewed chicken and rice taste so good before. We often had stewed chicken and rice; to-day we had it, and grapes and oranges. The sun was getting down low in the western sky, and the old castle, and the rocks and the trees were all taking their loveliest lights and colours. Then we got our Bibles and turned our backs upon the table.

"First of all, Uncle Sam, where are we?"

"This is, or was, Eleutheropolis."

"I don't know Eleutheropolis. It is not a Bible name."

"You are right. It is not. The name dates from the Emperor Septimius Severus, who gave privileges to certain

cities of the land; and the word means 'Free city.' Before that, and after that, it was Betogabra, corrupted to Beit-jibrin. No, it is not a Bible name. But an old historian testifies that the ruins of Mareshah were between one and two miles from Eleutheropolis; so it is supposed that the strange little tell we examined to-day, a mile and a half up the valley, may be the place of Abijah's fortified city, and near the site of Asa's famous battle."

"*That* Mareshah!" said I.

"A fortified city!" cried Liph.

"Nay, it was a fortress once, probably. Remember, in those days there was strength in hills; and that is evidently a hill that has once been turned to advantage for building purposes."

"Then, if that was Mareshah, the valley between it and us was the scene of the battle," said Dan.

"It may have been. It may well have been."

"But, Uncle Sam, how came that church up there?"

"It was built for the wants of the region. There used to be bishops at Eleutheropolis."

"Bishops and Christian churches!—here!" I exclaimed. "And what became of them, Uncle Sam?"

"Ruins"— said my uncle, smiling at me a little soberly. "The bishops and churches flourished in the early part of the fourth century. In the early part of the seventh century the Mohammedans took possession of Palestine."

"And who built this castle here?" Dan asked.

"The crusaders in the twelfth century. But the earlier work here is Roman."

"There is Roman work everywhere, I think. But I do not care about the crusaders just now. Who cut out all those caverns, those rooms in the rocks, that we have been looking at?"

"I do not know, Tiny. Nobody knows. But there are conjectures. Do you recollect that the ancient dwellers in Mount Seir were called *Horites?*"

"Certainly. That means *dwellers in caves*, you said. Oh, but the Horites were not here?"

"The Edomites took possession of Mount Seir, you remember, and were mixed up with the people of the land; of course learned their habits in respect of cave dwellings. Petra shows that. Now when Judah lay desolate during the time of the captivity in Babylon, the Edomites, or Idumæans, came in and took possession of the southern part of Palestine, and held possession for a good while. One of the Maccabees recovered Hebron and Ashdod and Mareshah from them, and another subdued them finally and made them conform to Jewish ways. But this whole southern part of Palestine was at one time called Idumæa; and it may well be that these caves are a memorial of that time."

"And they are all gone!" I said. The boys laughed at me.

"They are gone, and the Maccabees who conquered them, and the Romans who displaced the Maccabees, and the people who came after the Romans. They are all gone, Tiny, except the Grand Turk."

"Ay," said my uncle. "So the Lord said, 'I will overturn, overturn, overturn; until He come whose right it is.'"

"Who is that?" said Liph quickly.

"Don't you know? 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah;' and it is in the hand of the promised Son of David, whose kingdom 'shall not be left to other people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all those kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.' And I wish the king would come!"

"Do you think He will come?" Liph asked.

"I am looking for Him to come very soon."

"But He *did* come, didn't He?"

"Once, to save. The next time it will be to reign."

"We are getting a great way from Asa," said I. "Uncle Sam, do you think the battle with Zerah was fought here, in this valley?"

"We may think so. Mareshah was not two miles from Beit-jibrin; so much is fixed."

"Then on that queer white little hill was one of the for-

tresses of Abijah, with its walls and gates. But what could have become of all the ruins, Uncle Sam?"

"What becomes of them constantly in these regions. Used for building some new place; for Eleutheropolis, very likely."

"Then the Ethiopians and the army of Judah were all over these hills and valleys; and swords and spears and shields; and Zerah had chariots. But I suppose the Jews remembered how God had delivered them a few years before, when Jeroboam was fighting with them; and that helped their faith."

"Another thing helped their faith," said Uncle Sam.

We tried to guess what he meant, and we could not guess. We all tried, and failed.

"Children, they were obeying the Lord. One who knows he is not doing that, cannot go confidently to God and ask Him to keep His promises."

"Why not, sir?" Liph asked boldly. Uncle Sam's eyes opened at him a little.

"Because, my boy, the promises are made to God's children, and to nobody else."

"Well, sir, and don't His children sometimes do wrong?"

"They do; but till they give up doing wrong, they cannot with any face ask the Lord to grant them favours. Try it. There are no promises made to the disobedient. Read Isaiah xlviii. 18."

Liph read it.

"Now read the ninety-first psalm."

Liph read that.

"Do you see, it is he 'that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High' who is so covered and sheltered. That is, one who lives in the close presence of God and constant communion with Him. And you cannot live there, children, and allow yourselves in even the least little thing that you know the Lord does not like. How do you suppose Asa felt that day, when he had put his men in array against all the odds that confronted him?"

"I guess he wished he had more men," said Liph.

"Or he wished that a great storm would come to help him, as it helped Barak once," said Dan.

"I do not think it. Why should he? He trusted God; and that is enough for any one. And see, he pursued the fleeing enemy to Gerar; down the plain, far past Gaza; into what is desert now but was cultivated and inhabited then. Zerah's thousands could not stand before him. But children, with a bad conscience one cannot trust. And read Azariah's address to Asa and the people, verse 2."

"Azariah met them outside of Jerusalem, I suppose," said Dan.

"We are not told where. But it must have been a grand scene. Fancy Azariah standing on a commanding position where he could overlook a large body of men and be heard by them; and the armed men crowded together listening to him. Probably the army was already in part disbanded, individuals leaving it to repair to their neighbouring homes; but all the Benjamites would be in the column of march still; and many of Judah. And there the prophet stood and spoke, and the men of war below him stood and listened, 'Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The Lord is with you while ye be with Him: and if ye seek Him, He will be found of you: but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you.' What a commentary they had just had on the words!"

"How could they ever forget," said I, "and go and serve Baal again?"

"They did not forget, child; it was the hatred of a spiritual religion and love of their own will. It is always that."

"Who was Azariah?"

"We hear of him only in this place. One of the messengers whom God was always sending to teach and to warn the people."

"And Shemaiah was another, in Abijah's time; and Iddo the seer," said I. "And Hanani, in the sixteenth chapter, is another."

"According to the word delivered by Jeremiah," said my uncle.—"'I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking,

but ye heard not. . . . . Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them'" (Jer. vii.)

"What does that mean, 'rising up early and sending them'?"

"Just accommodation to our ways of speech and action, Tiny; using men's words that men may understand. You know what it means among us when we say the like; when a man *rises up early* to do something, we know he is very much in earnest, and he loses no time."

"In this speech of Azariah's," said Dan, "what time does he refer to, when Israel was 'without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law?' Was that in the times of the judges?"

"The description might apply so far, but there was no point then at which the details in verses 5, 6, were a reality. In the Hebrew in verse 3, there is no verb, neither past nor future; and the time of the rest depends upon the time of that; so it seems to be rather a general statement applying to future times, and to any times in which Israel should be in such a condition of godlessness."

"The description in verse 5 would do for the days of Samson, and of Barak, and of Saul," said Dan. "And of Gideon too."

"But verse 6 goes further and means too much. I think the whole looks forward. It was true, then, as you say; it was still more true in the days of the dispersion, under the Assyrian and Babylonian monarchies; and is now true; and the final confusion of the nations who forget God, will answer to the words yet still better. See what Moses had already foretold, Deut. iv. 27–29."

"I remember that," said Dan after he had read it.

"Now see Isaiah ix. 17–21,—and then Hosea iii. 4, 5, and iv. 1–7."

"But what time do these refer to?" Priscilla asked.

"In the first place, to the judgments upon the godless ten tribes; with a look forward in the third of Hosea to a still

more wasting desolation in the latter days. Then, for the time of the very end, see Matt. xxiv. 7."

"So prophecy goes on and on, fulfilling itself over and over?" cried Priscilla.

"Precisely. More and more fully and completely. And every successive fulfilment is a pledge of the others yet to come."

"Pray, why is Azariah in the 8th verse called Obed?"

"I cannot tell you. It is unexplained. Possibly an error in the text. Now the next thing in Asa's history is the obedience he gave to the prophet's words. First, he completed his reforms; banished idolatry from the land; deposed his grandmother from her dignity of queen mother, because she had set up an idol of Astarte, a 'horror' the Hebrew calls it. Only the high places sacred to Jehovah, though against the law, Asa could not abolish. The people seem to have held too fast to them."

"Why should they?"

"For the convenience of worshipping without going a journey to Jerusalem, perhaps. Perhaps from the superstition of having a sacred place near by them. They were very hard to get rid of, at any rate. Short of doing that, Asa's reforms and purifications of the land were thorough. Then followed the great sacrifice and renewing of the covenant at Jerusalem; and no doubt the hills around the city were covered with the tents of the assembly come to keep the feast. For, you see, it was not Asa's own people merely; but multitudes fell away to him out of the northern kingdom, and out of little Simeon in the south. The victory over Zerah had aroused them to a sense of what it was for Asa, or for anybody, to have 'the Lord his God with him.'"

"Why do not people see such things nowadays?"

"Such things as what? That it is good to have the Lord with us? They do, if they have anything better than bats' eyes."

"No, sir; I mean, such things as that victory. Why are there not such wonders now?"

"There are greater wonders than that, and plenty of them. But, Liph, God shows them to faith; and from the 'wise and prudent' of this world they are hid."

"But they were shown to the people of that time, sir?"

"And by report, so they are shown to you. We have all the advantage of those days and of our own too. And he who will not heed Moses and the prophets, would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead. So the Lord said Himself."

"Uncle Sam," Dan now began, "Zerah could not have come into the country before the eleventh year of Asa; but this feast was held in the fifteenth year."

"Well?"

"How could they keep the cattle so long for the sacrifices; the 'spoil which they brought'?"

"You assume that the famous battle must have been four years, previously, do you? Well, this tenth verse may assure you that it had only just taken place. The date of Zerah's invasion is nowhere else given. Asa had peace ten years; that is, from all adversaries. Who troubled the peace first, we are not told. Zerah must have come in Asa's fourteenth year. He was delayed probably on his way by the necessity of conquering Gaza and Mareshah before he went on to Jerusalem. That gave Asa time to gather his army and to hasten down hither. I suppose he never knew how great a force was opposed to him, till from some of the hills he caught a view of the Egyptians lying along in the valleys below; and then broke out his cry and prayer. After the battle, Asa lingered to pursue the enemy and to take the towns about Gerar, which seem to have been in the possession of Egypt or in alliance with it. So he returned to Jerusalem about the beginning of his fifteenth year; and then held the feast to the Lord."

"There's another thing," said Liph. "If people 'fell away' to him, as verse 9 says, out of Simeon, then that shows that Simeon was not joined to the kingdom of Judah."

"Quite true, Liph. It is strange. Either some of the

tribe had wandered, to the north and settled there; or Simeon had followed the example of the golden calves and set up an idolatrous worship for themselves. See what Amos says in chap. v. 5. You see he classes Beersheba with two other places where Israel had established such a worship. Simeon's district was in the pasture lands surrounding Beersheba, and seems not to have contented them; for they undertook different expeditions of conquest and colonising."

"Uncle Sam, why should such quantities of sacrifices be killed? I don't see."

"I suppose the larger portion of them were peace and thank offerings, parts of which according to law were consumed by the offerers. So the whole solemnity took the form not only of a feast to the Lord, but of a communion *with* the Lord. As friends sat together in the pleasure of each other's society and mutual enjoyment; as people used to eat together to seal a covenant just entered into."

"Did it mean *that?*" said I.

"It meant that, and it means that," said Uncle Sam. "Those feasts of the Levitical law were just an image and foreshowing of the communion the Lord will hold with His people, when the great assembly comes together; of the communion He holds with them now in detail. Read Isaiah's description of it, xxv. 6. And Jer. xxxi. 12–14."

"But oh, Uncle Sam, did those old Jews know their feasts and sacrifices meant that?"

"Only in part; some of the truly believing and devout ones. But do not confuse things. The sacrifices meant Christ. First the blood of peace-making; then the bread of feasting and joy. He is our life two ways, Tiny; first to save, then to feed us."

"And is that what the bread in the Lord's Supper means?"

"The wine and the bread. The blood of satisfaction; the bread of life."

"And that is what it means here in these lovely words of Jeremiah—'I will satiate the soul of the priests with fat-

ness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness'?"

"The fatness of the sacrifices—the unspeakable riches of Christ. Don't you know He says, 'He that cometh to me shall never hunger'? Now read Matthew xxii. 1-4; and then Revelation xix. 6-9."

"And *that* is what those old sacrifices meant!" said I. "And the people didn't know!"

"They always seemed to me so meaningless," Priscilla remarked. "So *many* sacrifices at one time, I mean."

"Some of them were sin-offerings, you must remember. And here the great sense of sin and the felt insufficiency of animal sacrifices to atone for it, led to an expression of that feeling in the numbers of the slain. But peace-offerings, and burnt-offerings which signify consecration of the worshipper's all, and thank-offerings, came in also."

"They meant it all honestly and seriously, Uncle Sam," I said. "They shouted and swore and made music, and were very glad."

"And yet they did not mean it," said Priscilla, "for they did not keep to it."

"Both true," said Uncle Sam. "And both true in our day. Did you never read of the seed sown on a rock, which sprang up quickly and could not bear the heat?"

"They were barbarous in their joy," said Liph, "declaring that whoever did not do as they did should be put to death."

"That was the law," said Uncle Sam. "Turn now to Exodus xxii. 20; Deut. xiii. 5-15; and xvii. 2-5."

We read them, and paused.

"Children," said my uncle, "our God is a good God, and a tender, and a merciful. You must always bear in mind that the Israelites and their history were intended for a sort of great illuminated spelling-book for the world, in which we were to learn to spell out the truths of God. Now, the fact is, that whosoever does not belong to the real people of God will be given over, at the last, to the second death. It is an image and earnest of this, that death should be the

punishment of separation from the symbolical people of God. It is the very truth, taught in the most forcible way. It is only the poor earthly shadow of what will be at that time, when every one that is 'not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire.' We have talked enough for to-night, children."

CHAPTER VII.

ASA AND BAASHA.

WE remained where we were the next day. Uncle Sam and the boys explored the old castle, made an excursion to the mouth of the wady, and went again up to the tell of Mareshah and into the caverns, I believe. Prissy and I sat still in our tent or near it; rested and read and wrote journal; and I sat and dreamed, trying to imagine the times that had been. By evening time we had plenty ready to talk about. The boys told of the ruins, the vaults and walls still to be seen, and the piece of the groined roof of the chapel.

"I have been looking at the outside of old walls all day," said I; "and thinking of Asa, and Zerah, and the crusaders; the people who built fortifications and the people who battered them down. How little use forts and castles seem to be, Uncle Sam."

Uncle Sam smiled, "Really not much, Tiny. But when any one can say with David, 'The Lord is my rock and my fortress'—he may add also—'and my deliverer.'"

"Uncle Sam, how could Asa forget it?"

"He forgot another word of his great forefather also—'Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom is no help.'"

"How could he, Uncle Sam? Asa, of all people!"

"It is a mystery, Tiny; a mystery that repeats itself very often around us. The deliverance that God gives, seems to be just an argument for people's thereafter doing without Him. Asa went down hill fast in his religious life."

"And yet the book says that his heart was perfect with the Lord all his days," Priscilla added.

"Which means, I suppose, that he never did at all depart from the Lord to serve idols. So far he held firm."

"Now, Uncle Sam," I went on, "in 2 Chron. xvi. 1, it says Baasha came up against Ramah; where is Ramah?"

"About six miles north of Jerusalem."

"He came so near! No wonder Asa was troubled. And built a city, or a fort there. Why did not Asa go against him with an army, as he went against Zerah?"

"I cannot tell. He had looked away from God and was looking to second causes. Of course he was badly frightened."

"What did Baasha build that place for?"

"To injure and oppress Judah and Asa, by stopping the course of all travel and traffic in that direction. The great highway north was blocked up. We must infer, too, that the king of Israel had first retaken Bethel and the other places which Abijah had conquered from Jeroboam."

"Uncle Sam," said Liph, "there is some difficulty here. How could Baasha build Ramah in the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign, when he died in the twenty-sixth?"

"He could not; therefore there is manifestly an error. Probably made by the scribes in mistaking one Hebrew letter for another, which is easily done. The old numeration was expressed in letters of the alphabet."

"Then when *did* Baasha come?"

"I cannot tell with certainty. Some suppose it was in Asa's sixteenth year of reign; just after the celebration of the covenant with all Judah. This seems to me unlikely. Asa's heart *then* would hardly have slipped so far away from God. We need time to account for it. Besides, the last verse of 2 Chron. xv. would read awkwardly on that supposition, 'No more war,' *until the next year.* We must leave it, as one of those things very simple to explain if we had the data. It is supposed indeed that one reason of Asa's action in sending to the king of Syria is to be found in the fact that his army had been greatly weakened in the fight with Zerah; which I think very improbable."

"It was a mean thing anyhow that Asa wanted Benhadad to do," said Dan; "break his league with Baasha."

"For value received," said Uncle Sam. "And Asa impoverished himself needlessly."

"I thought Shishak had carried off all the treasure there was," said Priscilla.

"Treasure had begun to accumulate again. Abijah had consecrated 'silver and gold and vessels' to the service of God, and Asa himself had given still more, and delivered it all into the Lord's treasury. Now he stripped both that and his own palace."

"Wasn't it bad policy," said Dan, "to ask help of Syria at all? wasn't it dangerous?"

"Very bad policy, and very dangerous. The foreign help called in is apt to be the only party winning in the end; ever since Æsop's fable, and before."

"So it was when the Saxons were invited into England," said Liph.

"And when the Romans were called into Judea," said Dan.

"So it has been countless times. *Benhadad* means, the son of Hadad, and Hadad is held to have been a name for the sun-god. His father was Tabrimmon, or 'good is Rimmon'; so there you have the religious situation. And for the political, the king of Syria sent his forces against the north of Israel. The cities named lie in and about rich districts to the north and north-west of Lake Huleh; and Gennesareth you know; that is Cinneroth, pronounced Kinneroth, the rich plain west of the lake of the same name. With these places of course all the country of Naphtali was overrun and laid waste. Baasha had enough to do at home."

"'Then Asa the king took all Judah' (2 Chron. xvi. 6). What does that mean?"

"See 1 Kings xv. 22. 'None was exempted.' Why, he summoned all the people of the land to come and help; and they took away Baasha's fortifications, stone by stone, and built, that is, fortified with the materials he had

gathered, Geba and Mizpeh; two places at no great distance."

"Couldn't we go there, Uncle Sam?"

"Without doubt. Certainly we will go there. Both places are but a little way north of Jerusalem. Yes, we will go there, and study Asa's folly on the spot."

The talk went off then somehow into what the boys had been seeing to-day, the crusades, and the probable site of Gath; and we left Asa's history, to take it up on different ground. Next morning we went back to Jerusalem. We camped outside the walls, and were ready the following day to set forward our march again. It was a march; people have to go single file riding over Palestine roads; and our train was quite a long one. I had ceased to be afraid. Uncle Sam was always just behind me, and our chief of staff, Mustapha, just before me.

"Where do we camp for to-night?" Dan asked as we were eating breakfast.

"At Mizpeh, I believe."

"That tells me nothing, sir."

"Does Nebi-Samwil tell you more?"

"Yes, sir. I have looked at that often enough, from a distance."

"It commands one of the finest views in all Palestine. You will not forget it after you have been there once."

"Mizpeh was one of the places Asa fortified," said Liph. "Is it certain that Nebi-Samwil is that place?"

"I cannot say it is certain. Most authorities accept it. Dean Stanley would have Nebi-Samwil to be the high place of Gibeon; but Gibeon is well enough ascertained to be another high place in its neighbourhood, so that objection falls."

"It will not make a long day's journey, Uncle Sam, if we go only so far."

"We are going farther, to visit Ramah and Geba. Those first, and then we'll come back to the supposed Mizpeh."

We had a delicious ride along the great northern road for less than two hours, and then turned off from it to the

right. In a few minutes more we stood on the height of Ramah. It is a high hill, very high; for we could see it as we approached Jerusalem the day before, its round head towering up above the heights between. On the summit is a miserable village of perhaps a dozen houses.

"Baasha's buildings are pretty well gone," remarked Dan; while I sat in my saddle and let my eye roam over the wide view. The country was singularly rocky; there were rocks everywhere, it seemed; but Uncle Sam said the soil between the rocks was very fine and the whole landscape had looked like a garden once. Fig-trees could be seen sometimes, and here and there a little rich plain; but this was not the time of year for flowers or grass or corn; and I must say it was very bare indeed to the eye; grey and sterile. Some large squared stones were to be seen on the hill, and also some columns lying here and there; and a little building still standing had once been a church, they said; it had come down to be a mosque.

"Now we will go on to Geba," said Uncle Sam. That lay still farther eastward, out of sight behind the swells of ground; but half an hour's riding brought us there. The whole country, I should remark, is cut up by deep wadies, or ravines; between the ravines there are stretches of rocky table-land; the whole is an alternation of these; the little plains here and there do not change the character of the region. Geba, or where Geba was, is a little low rounded hill rising from this table-land. Here we were to lunch; so we got off our horses, spread carpets, sat down, and took things easily, as Dan said.

Here again were the miserable remains of a little village, partly deserted. Here, too, among the ruins could be seen large squared stones that dated from times far back. A remnant of a stone tower, too, and a little edifice that might once have been a church. But how bare and waste it all was! Down below the village the ground spread into a large plain; but as I said, now was the dried-up time for everything. My eye wandered off. I could look down the ravines towards the west, till they opened out into the plain

of Jordan; down, down the Jordan plain till it was ended by the waters of the Dead Sea. Still beyond stretched the long line of the Moab mountains, for miles and miles. I forgot everything in looking.

"Eat your lunch!" said Priscilla. "The hills will not run away."

"What is that slim green line, down in the plain?" I asked.

"The green thicket or jungle which is fed by the waters of the Jordan."

"Is the Jordan *there?*"

"Twisting about between its mud banks. We are upon the famous scene of Jonathan's exploit against the Philistines. Saul's camp was here, after he removed it from Gilgal."

"Where was Gilgal?"

"Down yonder in the plain, a little this side of the Dead Sea."

"How far is it from here down to the Jordan?"

"About eighteen or twenty miles."

We all cried out; that green line looked so near.

"Then where was Michmash?"

"Turn round; it was north of you. There, on the other side of the ravine, about a mile off, don't you see a little village among the rocks? thereabouts was the camp of the Philistines. But we cannot study Jonathan now; we are busy with Asa."

"Yes. Why did he choose this place?"

"It was on the northern border of his kingdom, and a commanding situation, as you see."

"Seems to me, he had a poor kingdom of it," said Liph; "rich in nothing but limestone."

"It looked different then, when every foot of soil was made the most of. It was not barren, but rich and fruitful. Witness the oil and corn which Solomon paid to Hiram. But come, children; we will talk more about Asa this evening."

Our camp we found set in a beautiful little plain at the

foot of Nebi-Samwil. We did not try to go to the top to-day, having done enough. We dined and refreshed ourselves, and came together with our Bibles. Yet at first we could not talk, only look. Around us lay a rich plain, in its autumn drought and stubble certainly, but showing olive-groves, and plantations of vines, lovely to the eye. Before us, divided from us by an arm of this plain, rose a round little hill, terraced so that its sides looked like a succession of stone steps. These terraces were, however, planted with trees and vines. Ruins of course at the top, as at the top of all hills in Palestine. The mellow evening light, the shadows lying along the plain, the gleams on rocks and ruins, the feeling that it was Palestine, all filled us with pleasure that was a little tender, if not sorrowful.

"What place was there, Uncle Sam, on that beautiful little hill?"

"Gibeon. El-Jib now."

"Gibeon?" said I. "Oh, was *there* the high place where Solomon offered so many sacrifices at his coronation and prayed his prayer for wisdom?"

"There it was, I suppose. There the great altar of burnt-offering kept its place after the destruction of Nob until the Temple was built. From the old town on the hill went forth the Gibeonites who tricked Joshua; and on this plain began the battle of the long day, when he fought the five kings of the Amorites. And here happened many another thing known in history."

"And this other hill, rising above us, was Asa's Mizpeh?"

"So it is believed. *Mizpeh* means a 'watch-tower,' and *Geba* a 'hill,' and *Ramah* a 'high place'—accordingly we have variations of the three constantly. This Mizpeh answers to the conditions of the story, and we suppose it was Asa's fortified place. It is the highest point of all the mountain country round about Jerusalem. We will see it to-morrow. Now let us go on with our story. Read 2 Chron. xvi. 7, 9."

"Who was Hanani?"

"One of the Lord's faithful servants. We never hear of him again. We hear of his son Jehu, who had the like disagreeable work to do as his father."

"What disagreeable work, Uncle Sam?"

"Telling the truth, child. Those who are not the Lord's people don't like it. 'Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?' the Lord said to the Jews of His time. 'They beat one, and stoned another, and killed another.' Hanani got the stocks and the prison. And the stocks we read of here were not a harmless confinement of hands and feet, but a torturing, stretching, or twisting of the person into a position of discomfort; which would soon become a position of acute pain from his being unable to change it."

"Well," said Liph, "what use was there in his being so impudent?"

"O Liph!" said I. "He was giving God's message."

"He might have made it pleasanter. Nobody would like such a speech made to him. And as I said, what use? The thing was done."

"That's the way people talk nowadays," said Uncle Sam. "But the Lord does not like messengers who change or hide His message. The use was, that Asa and Judah, and after them we, should know the truth, Liph."

"What truth, sir?"

"This very important truth—that Asa lost his aim through not looking to God for it. So do other people often, when there is no Hanani to tell them. They might read it here, if they would, why they fail."

"But Asa did not fail. Baasha had to quit what he was doing and leave him."

"Ah yes, but see. It is evident that Benhadad, being in league with the king of Israel, had been about to join him in making war upon Asa; it may be that it was this very combination which had so raised Asa's fears that he could not trust God for the issue. Now Hanani tells him his mistake. If he *had* trusted the Lord, the host of the king of Syria would have been given into his hand, like

the host of Zerah the Ethiopian. Instead of which, Asa had got only a temporary relief, and introduced an alliance into Judah which would by and by give trouble."

"From henceforth, he was to 'have wars.' Not Asa merely or especially; but his whole kingdom."

"Uncle Sam," said I, "would the Lord always deliver, if people trusted Him?"

"Let us see, Tiny. Find Isaiah xxxi. 1."

"Then ought we not to make preparations and arm ourselves, and fight?" Liph asked.

"Do all you can do, and then don't put your trust in it. Read Jer. xvii. 5–8."

"It seems, Uncle Sam, that the Lord cares more about our trusting Him than about anything else."

"Is that strange, Tiny? Do we care for anything else a friend can give us, if his *trust* is gone? Is there any friendship left? Can a child please his parents, if he does not obey them?"

"But this is *trust*," said I, "not obedience."

"You cannot trust God if you are disobeying Him. Now look back at 2 Chron. xiii. There Judah trusted God, and the battle, which showed great odds against them, went overwhelmingly in their favour. Read 2 Kings xviii. 1–7. You see Hezekiah 'trusted in the Lord God of Israel;'—and it followed that 'he prospered whithersoever he went forth,' and he was able to throw off the yoke of Assyria. See 1 Chronicles v. 18–22, and then read Psalm xxxvii. 39, 40."

We read these passages, and even Liph was silenced.

"What is this about Asa's 'oppressing some of the people,' at the time he put Hanani in prison?"

"Probably there was discontent and possibly opposition on the part of some of the nobles, who heard the prophet's speech and disapproved the treatment dealt out to him. So they got themselves into trouble."

"Then how *could* it be said, Uncle Sam, that Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days? It is said so in 1 Kings xv. 14."

"It could not be said in the sense we commonly give to it. I suppose it means simply that Asa was faithful to the worship of the God of Israel and had nothing whatever to do with idols. In that sense he remained true. But faith and love seemed to be on a diminishing scale with him through the latter part of his life; and in his last illness he forgot all together to apply to his only real Helper. Judah mourned for him as for one of her good kings, nevertheless; we see the funeral ceremonies were very magnificent."

"Did the Jews burn the bodies of their dead?" Dan asked.

"Certainly not. They were buried in rock tombs, without coffins, wound up with spices. At great funerals, such as those of royal persons, it was customary to make a burning pile of costly sweet spices. See Jer. xxxiv. 5."

"So it was an honour," said I.

"Ay," said my uncle; "as good as salvos of artillery, or a city hung in crape."

"'And they buried him in his own sepulchre, which he had made for himself,'" said I, reading from the fourteenth verse. "That means, the rock tomb which he had had cut. Uncle Sam, we have not been to see the rock tombs in the valley of Jehoshaphat yet."

"No. We will see them. Now we must go to rest, and let Tiny have a good long sleep, to be fresh for to-morrow."

So it was; and next day we let our tents and camp equipage be packed up again and sent off to their old place on the Mount of Olives; and we climbed the hill of Nebi-Samwil; Asa's Mizpeh, *perhaps*. I wished for certainty, but Uncle Sam said we must content ourselves with probability. The path was steep, and we were half an hour getting up. There we found a large building, a mosque, now unused, with a poor little cluster of houses beside it. We mounted up to the roof and into the minaret; and then we had a view!

"Uncle Sam, you are not sure that this was Mizpeh," I said after a silence. "I wish you were sure."

"Yes, so do I, Tiny. In the third chapter of Nehemiah we find the men of Gibeon and the men of Mizpeh working together on the wall of Jerusalem; so it seems they were neighbours. And there is Gibeon, down there on its little hill. And Mizpeh, a 'watch-tower,' suits this point, which is the highest in all the country round. Then by one old author it is called Mount Gibeon; so that makes a little confusion. We will think it was Asa's Mizpeh. Now you can see here, children, how near together came the east and west boundaries of the land; yonder is the Mediterranean,—do you see those ships upon it?—and over there on the other side are the Moab hills. I wish it were evening, that you might see the colours of the rocks. When the setting sun shines full against them, the reds and purples and greys come out beautifully. But you can see that from the Mount of Olives."

"How straight the line of those hills is!" said Priscilla. "Like a wall."

"And a wall they were, fortifying the country on that side. Now turn north; look away there in the far north; that is Carmel, setting out into the sea. Between are the hills of Ephraim. Just here we are in the midst of the territory of Benjamin."

"Then is that plain yonder the plain of Sharon?" Liph asked.

"Precisely. You can see Lydda and Joppa. In the north-east, you may recognise our friends Ramah and Geba. Those furthest hills in the south are near Hebron. Jerusalem is some six or eight miles off. Do you see a prominent round-topped hill beyond Jerusalem, beyond where Bethlehem lies? It is Jebel Fureidis, where Herod was buried."

We got eager about the historical associations, the scenes and monuments of which were all about us. Out came Bibles; we all read and studied, and compared the stories with the scenes where they happened, and asked questions and listened to explanations. Lunch-time came, and we took lunch; and then went on with the historico-geogra-

phical lesson. It was late in the afternoon when we at last broke up, and left our watch-tower to return to our present home on the Mount of Olives. When we got there, the rose and purple lights were on the mountains of Moab, and shadows were beginning to gather in the ravines around Jerusalem.

CHAPTER VIII.

JEHOSHAPHAT AND AHAB.

"Now we come to Jehoshaphat," said Liph that evening.

"Have we done with Asa?" said Uncle Sam.

"I thought so, sir. We have finished his history—buried him, and made a burning for him."

"What do you think the Lord gives us his history for?"

"I know," said Priscilla; "to get the lessons from it. But I thought we had got the lessons?"

"What are they, then?"

"To trust in the Lord," said Dan.

"And to obey Him wholly. That must come first. You must put away all the idols and every evil thing out of your kingdom, if you want to have the Lord with you."

"We have no kingdom," said Dan.

"Have you not? You have your own heart and life. See if there is anything there that the Lord does not like; a habit, or a pleasure, or a pursuit, or a wish? What are you doing for God's service? what becomes of your money, and time? what does your tongue speak, when it speaks anything? how much light does your example give to others? how do you spend the Lord's day?"

"Oh but, Uncle Sam!" Priscilla exclaimed; "of course we are not *perfect!*"

"Is it so a matter of course?"

"Why, yes, sir."

"Then what becomes of the Lord's promise? I grant you, without Him we can do nothing; but now look at Ezek. xxxvi. 25–28."

We read it, and I for one felt glad.

"Now see Jer. xxxi. 31–34. And then, children, turn to

Luke xxii. 20,—and for 'testament' read 'covenant;' the word is the same in the original."

We read both passages, and nobody answered.

"There you have it, children; now do not say again that you cannot be as thoroughgoing as King Asa was. What good things to him followed upon his reforms?"

"The Lord gave him rest," said Priscilla.

"The Lord was with him," said I.

"Now tell me the promises contained in those chapters."

"'The Lord is with you, while ye be with Him.'"

"'Be strong, and let not your hands be weak, and your work shall be rewarded.'"

"Children, the word is just as true now as ever it was."

"Then this promise," I went on. And I read 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

"Think of it. The eyes of the Lord watching for the good of every one truly His own; providing, arranging, guarding, that all shall be for their safety and welfare. What did not Asa lose by losing his trust! The conquest of the Syrians, the Lord's keeping, the peace of his kingdom, and the healing of his disease. Well, now, we will go on to his son's reign. Let us begin with 2 Chron. xvii. and get all the sense of it."

"'He strengthened himself,'" I repeated, after reading the first verse.

"Verse 2 tells you how. He garrisoned the cities of Judah and the cities Asa had taken from Ephraim; the same, probably, which Abijah had won, which Baasha retook, and which Asa had got back again. But the next three verses give still more light on the subject, and show us that Jehoshaphat's strength came from God, just as we have been saying."

"'Not after the doings of Israel'—how is that?" I queried.

"Israel worshipped the Lord in the images of the calves, so bringing their worship in fact near to the Baal worship, Jehoshaphat took away all the Baal high places and images

of Astarte (called 'groves') in all the land. He made so far a clean land of it."

"I thought Asa had done that," Liph remarked.

"In the early part of his reign. Latterly, no doubt, abuses had crept in again. They were always creeping in. And therefore because he made thorough work with them, the Lord established the kingdom in Jehoshaphat's hand. Ah, children, it is the easiest road to success!"

"All Judah brought him presents," Liph said. "That means tribute, I suppose."

"The word does not mean that. No, it signifies *gifts;* in the honour and reverence the people bore to him, they brought him offerings, to content both feelings; and the kingdom blossomed out into a state of riches and prosperity that reminded one of the days of David and Solomon. See 1 Chron. xxix. 28, and 11 Chron. i. 12."

Liph read verse 6, and observed that he thought "it was not well for people's hearts to be 'lifted up.'"

"It is used in a good sense here. The king's heart was strengthened, encouraged, to go on with his reforms and righteous ways. So he cleared Judah of all but the high places sacred to Jehovah; see ch. xx. 33. And then he took another and a new step. He sent a commission of five nobles high in place, nine Levites and two priests to go through the country and read the book of the law to the people."

"The book of the law? how much was that?"

"The whole books of Moses, the pentateuch; it was gathered into a whole long before this time. But there were few copies; the people were largely ignorant of what was in it. In those days there were no synagogues and Sabbath readings."

"No prophets either?" said Priscilla.

"Prophets, yes; we have heard of some. But not writings of the prophets, Isaiah did not begin to have revelations till some one hundred and fifty years later. They had a very little Bible in those days; and hardly any of the people were acquainted with that. Of course, in the

lapse of years all sorts of irregularities and breaches of the law had crept into practice, not only religious but civil as well; though it is true, under the law of the Lord the civil was religious also."

"Oughtn't it to be so always, Uncle Sam?"

"Tiny, I think so."

"That must have been a pretty time in Judah," I said.

"Why?" said Liph.

"Just think," said I. "Imagine those nobles and Levites, going about from village to village and gathering the people together and reading to them the commands of the law, and explaining the words. And all through Judah imagine the wrong ways put right; and the people coming to know the beautiful stories of the Bible"——

"Of so much of it."

"Yes, I mean, of so much of it; and the promises and the orders; and then every one who really wanted to do right would change anything he had been doing that was not right. I should think, that going through the land with the book of the law would have been like an inundation of the Nile—leaving riches for the country all over."

The boys laughed at my illustration, but I thought Uncle Sam did not laugh; and as my eye went over the grey hills in sight, so grey and desolate in much of their extent, I felt how Judah had lost by not keeping the law when she had it. And Jerusalem!

"It is so difficult to realise that Jehoshaphat reigned once over there," said I.

"And that over all those hills and dales, south and west and north of us, that commission of princes and Levites went, reading the law."

"And the kingdom thereupon blossomed out into beauty and strength," Uncle Sam went on. "Read verse 10, and then Prov. xvi. 7."

"Uncle Sam, is it always so?"

"Tiny, do you think the Lord keeps His promises *sometimes?*"

"Then why do not people see that it is the best way?"

"Because they like their own way, child."

"It says, 'the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms'—what does that mean? were they afraid of the God of Israel?"

"We can find out, I think, what it means. Turn to Gen. xxxv. 5. The 'terror of Jehovah' is the Hebrew expression. Now see besides, Exod. xxiii. 27, and Deut. xi. 25, and Josh. ii. 9."

"So it was a fear of *them*, which God put upon the people!" said Dan. "Oh, that's beautiful. Then I suppose the Philistines were subdued under Jehoshaphat, as they brought tribute silver?"

"Not tribute silver, but 'silver a burden'—that is, loads of it. Sacks of treasure no doubt, as the like are still handled in Turkey at the present day."

"What did they bring it for, then?"

"To secure his favour, or peace with him, perhaps. The cattle brought by the Arabs were tribute no doubt; they may have come from the region round about Gerar, where Asa's victory over the Cushites was carried out, 2 Chron. xiv. 14. And Jehoshaphat waxed rich and mighty; built fortresses, and cities for merchandise, and had, not 'much work' or 'business,' verse 13, but 'much store'; that is, great stock of property and valuables laid up. Then the army seems to have been equipped and organised; and the numbers given of the different bodies are enormous. Of Benjamin alone, 200,000 armed with bows and arrows, and 180,000 with the usual army equipment, sword and spear and shield.

"Now we come to the one fault or mistake recorded of Jehoshaphat. He was one of the very best kings Judah ever knew. He followed the Lord heartily and without swerving; and he ordered and governed his kingdom according to the law, and was prosperous, wealthy, and in peace. His one fault was, that he made friendship with the kings of Israel."

"With Ahab," said Liph.

"With Ahab, and with Ahab's son and grandson. And that brought its punishment."

"But, Uncle Sam, I thought peace was a good thing," I ventured.

"'First pure, then peaceable,' is the Bible rule, Tiny."

"What was there, not pure, in making peace with Israel?" said Liph.

"In making alliance or friendship with the Lord's enemies, there is always implied a little disloyalty to Him. Jehoshaphat was not disloyal, but probably he was of an amiable, easy-going temper, and inclined to take the pleasant side of things. He did not need Ahab; on the contrary, it was probably Ahab that courted him. Or it may have been his son Jehoram."

"Joram married Ahab's daughter," said Liph.

"Yes, when Jehoshaphat had been about six years upon the throne. How it came about, we do not know; but it is easy to guess that the clever and wicked Athaliah, when she came to her father-in-law's court, may have wrought upon his kind nature and done a good deal to bring about the visit which Jehoshaphat made nine years later to her own father's court. It was a sorry business!"

"Why, sir?" said Liph.

"There came to be a close connection between the two families. Joram's son was named after Athaliah's brother, his uncle, Ahab's son and successor. Jehoshaphat and his grandson both got involved in the quarrels of the kings of Israël, to the death of the one and the great danger of the other. Then when she got a chance, Athaliah introduced Phœnician idolatry in Judah, as her mother Jezebel had done in the northern kingdom. And it was not thirty years from the time when Joram brought her home as a bride to the court of Judah, that she murdered, or caused to be murdered, the whole remaining of the royal line of David; every one, excepting one little child who was concealed and preserved. Not to speak of the fact that Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab was the first occasion of a broil with Syria. But most of all, Liph, the alliance dis-

pleased God. 'Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?'"

"I thought we ought to love everybody."

"Love them if you will, but you must not form connections with them; you must not work with them. Not if you are the Lord's. See 2 Cor. vi. 14."

"I thought that meant marrying," said Dan, when Liph had read the passage.

"It does not say, marrying. Never take the Bible to mean more, *or less*, than it says. 'Unequally yoked together' would apply certainly to cases of marriage, but also to all manner of business partnerships and connections."

"Do you think so, sir?"

"We shall see it, I think, before we have done with Jehoshaphat's history."

"But that is very hard, sir."

"Is it? Depend upon it, the other way is harder. Now go on with the history. Jehoshaphat went down to see Ahab, where he had no business to go; and then he was drawn into what he had no business to do. You see 2 Chron. xviii. 2, Ahab made a great entertainment for him and 'persuaded him,' to help recover the city of Ramoth-Gilead, which the Syrians, by treaty, should have given up. Jehoshaphat fell into the snare, and only kept so much of his wits as to insist upon asking counsel of the Lord before they set out."

"What prophets were these, Uncle Sam, whom Ahab gathered together? four hundred of them. Prophets of Baal?"

"Jehoshaphat would never have asked counsel of them. No; they must have been false prophets of Jehovah; prophets of the calves."

"Oh!" said Priscilla, "then of course they were false."

"Well did they speak so just to flatter the king? That seems dangerous," said Dan.

"Remember, there was a lying spirit in their mouths."

"That means, they were pretending," said Liph.

"It means that Satan, or one of his ministers, told them what to say," said Dan.

"But God sent the spirit," said I. "What does it mean?"

"It says that God sent him; therefore it must have been a spirit; a spirit that proposed to go, and to whom God said, Go."

"But a *wicked* spirit, Uncle Sam?"

"It means, the principle of evil in those prophets' hearts," said Liph.

"How could an evil principle, that is, an evil feeling or inclination, offer itself to go and work Ahab's ruin? or how could God send *that?* He 'tempteth not any man.' James 1. 13."

"But He sent the spirit, Uncle Sam?"

"Yes, Tiny. He does allow Satan and his ministers to tempt people. It is their own fault if they give in to temptation. In this case Ahab had persistently refused to hear the word of the Lord, which would have saved him. Now the time of his destruction was come, and the Lord sent one of the spirits of evil to persuade him to go to his death. Only to *persuade* him, mind; and if Ahab had been good he would not have been persuaded; he was free; nevertheless, God knew that he would leave the right to follow the wrong, and this time to his ruin. The same thing is happening every day, children. The devil, whom men insist upon following, is at last allowed to torment them at his will. Now I will give you some Bible testimony on the subject. Let us read it all patiently."

I kept a list of the passages which we went over, and here they are.

Gen. iii. 1–13; Judges ix.; 1 Chron. xxi. 1, with 2 Sam. xxiv. 1; Matt. iv. 1–11, xiii. 19, 25, 39; Luke viii. 12; xxii. 3, 31; John xiii. 2, 27; Acts v. 3; 2 Cor. ii. 11; Eph. ii. 2, iv. 27, vi. 11; 1 Thess. iii. 5; James iv. 7; 1 Peter v. 8; 1 John ii. 13, 14; Rev. xii. 9; xx. 3, 8, 10.

We read all these, and then Uncle Sam said he would leave us to judge, in the light of the other passages, what was the meaning in this place. We read also the first and

second chapters of Job. After that, Liph had not much to say. Prissy and I wanted to go on to ask a great many questions; but Uncle Sam brought us back to the history we were following. "One thing at a time," he said.

"Think what a scene that must have been," said Priscilla. "The two kings sitting in state before the gate—why before the gate?"

"No open space large enough inside, probably," Uncle Sam answered. "Gates of cities were great places of business in old time."

—"And the four hundred prophets prophesying, and the man with iron horns, pushing his head about and saying, 'With these shalt thou push the Syrians.'—What did he mean?"

"An old fashion," said Uncle Sam; "to act out the thing, whatever it was, before the eyes of men. It made it very striking! Even we sometimes hang out pictures to draw people's attention to things; those actions were pictures and pantomime both. The horn was the symbol of strength and honour. In Moses' prophecy concerning the tribes of Israel, Ephraim's horns are said to be buffalo's horns; not unicorn's; the *reem* was the powerful wild buffalo; with them he was to 'push the nations;' Deut. xxxiii. 17. And the standard of the camp of Ephraim was a calf's head on a golden ground. Zedekiah was probably appealing to national pride."

"But Jehoshaphat was not satisfied."

"Because these were idolatrous prophets; not the Lord's servants, however they might call themselves."

"Uncle Sam, in 1 Kings xxii. 26, it says, 'Take Micaiah and carry him *back* to the governor!'"

"So probably he had been brought out of prison to speak to Ahab."

"What became of him?"

"We do not know. Possibly, when Ahab was dead and the army fled home, in the fear and the rage of men's spirits, when Zedekiah was obliged to shrink and flee from those who sought revenge upon him, Micah may have been set at

liberty; but it does not follow. The servants of the Lord had to take the wind on their face in those days, and in all days."

"Do you think so, sir?" said Liph. "Why"——

"Try," said my uncle interrupting him; "try; and tell me your experience. For the present let us stick to Jehoshaphat."

"Why did he go with Ahab, after all Micaiah's warning?"

"Easy tempered—ashamed to go back, perhaps; like many another. So he got into a pinch."

"The account of the battle in 2 Chron. xviii. is very curious," said Dan. "Jehoshaphat got into a pinch, as you say, but 'God moved them to depart from him;' and then, though Ahab was disguised, 'a certain man drew a bow at a venture'—and it hit him: the arrow did, I mean."

"So it is," said Uncle Sam. "All is in God's hand. No disguises are anything before His eyes."

"But then He guided that arrow, and turned the battle away from Jehoshaphat?"

"He sends His angels to do that sort of thing continually; His 'ministers;' but there again, Dan, I think in sending evil the Lord uses the agency of the ministers of Satan. Compare 2 Cor. xii. 7."

"What were the 'joints of the harness'?"

"Must leave that for another time. We ought to talk about all the whole old system of warfare, armour and all. Perhaps we can do that best when we come to Sennacherib. The coat-of-mail, however, covered only the breast; below it was a looser continuation of it which fell to the hips; the two were clasped or looped together; and there, near the place of the lowest rib, were the joints of the harness."

CHAPTER IX.

VALLEY OF BERACHAH.

WE stayed in our camp next day, resting, reading, and writing; and I for my part spent a great deal of time watching the colours and lights and shades on Jerusalem and the hills and valleys round about it, and musing over the times that had been. All of us looked forward to the evening talk, and the boys used to get questions ready. We came to it this evening very fresh.

"Jehu was the son of the prophet whom Asa put in the stocks," I began. "Do we know anything else about him?"

"Yes," said Dan. "He was sent years before, to tell Baasha the king of Israel, that his family should be cut off, and their dead not buried. Perhaps Jehu was sent on that errand because his father was in the stocks and could not go. What disagreeable work those old prophets had to do, Uncle Sam!"

"Ah, they felt that. Jeremiah wished he had never been born. It is not easy at any time, my boy, to tell people unwelcome truths. They will not always hear as obediently as this good king did. See now what he set about. He went through the land again, perfecting his reforms, and establishing everywhere courts of judgment, and placing men to judge to whom he gave the noblest of charges. 'Ye judge not for man, but for the Lord.' Ah, that that could be said again in our day."

"I do not understand it," said Liph.

"No," said my uncle, "it is not the fashion of the day to understand it. *We* are the authority, men say. But the Bible says, 'the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the governor among the nations.'"

"But not literally, sir?"

"Well look at Deut. i. 17. 'The judgment is God's.' See Prov. xvi. 11. And then see Rom. xiii. 1-6. The ruler, or the judge, is the minister of God, has his authority from Him and 'must give account to Him; all the same whether the machinery by which he is appointed be the word of a superior in power, or the votes of his fellow-citizens. Being in office, his work is for God, and he is answerable to God alone."

"Uncle Sam, people don't think so"

"The main point with me is, whether God thinks so. Now let us see a little more nearly about Jehoshaphat's doings. You see in verse 8 (2 Chron. xix.) that the judges were priests, Levites, and elders. At the very first the judges were elders alone. See Exod. xviii. 25, 26. Then when the people had greatly increased and they were settled in the land and the relations of society had become more varied, David appointed Levites to be writers and judges. 1 Chron. xxiii. 4. For the Levites, having better knowledge of the law, could decide rightly and instruct the people as to the truth. Jehoshaphat set such officers in all the principal cities, and at Jerusalem a supreme court of appeal; in which Amariah was over the religious and Zebadiah over the civil department; verse 11."

"'When they returned to Jerusalem,—verse 8, when who returned?"

"The king and his ministers who went through the land. When they got back, he established this supreme court, and bade them true-heartedly, 'Deal courageously, and the Lord shall be with the good.'"

"Now we are coming to the Valley of Blessing," cried I.

"Not so fast; first we come to the tidings of danger. A very vast multitude from the country beyond and below the Dead Sea were moving, as it appears, to take the land of Judah in possession; a multitude before which even the armies of the king could make no stand. They had come round the Dead Sea, as far as the little oasis of Engedi. There a fearful mountain pass leads up to the table-land

above, from which the land would lie open to the invaders. So the king called the people and the people came, wives and little children and all, and stood before the Lord."

"People never do that in vain, do they, Uncle Sam?"

"Never! when they can call upon their covenant God. Even wicked people, like Manasseh and the Ninevites, God will often hear when they humble themselves to seek Him; but His covenant children, always! And you see, Jehoshaphat pleaded that they were His covenant children."

"Then another prophet gave the answer," said Dan. "Jahaziel the Levite. What an answer! 'The battle is not yours but God's.' Yet God's people have to fight, sir?"

"A certain sort of fight, my boy; the fight of faith. Read the enumeration of the Christian armour in Eph. vi. Faith, hope, the Bible, and prayer! That leaves the struggle with the enemy, don't you see, pretty much in God's hands? Isaiah said the same thing; xxx. 7, 15. 'The Egyptians shall help in vain and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, *their strength is to sit still.* . . In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.'"

"That's good for weak people, Uncle Sam," said I.

"And who isn't weak, Tiny."

"But the Bible talks, I am sure, about the Christian life being a struggle and a warfare?" said Dan.

"Ay, my son, with the Lord's enemies; not with your own. Your fighting with them will not do anything. But 'the Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.' What has the Lord been saying to His weak children from the beginning, but—'Fear not.' And when they understand it, *they* say, 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?'"

"And so it was in this case," said I.

"So it was here. The king and the people believed the word of the Lord, and they *were not afraid.* They marched out to meet that vast multitude, and they went singing; singing beforehand, before the victory was gained; singing

and praising. And take notice, it was when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against their enemies."

"Some of the Jews?"

"No, hardly. As nearly as we can make it out, a panic arose, occasioned by an unexpected side attack from some enemy unknown, taking an opportunity to fall upon a portion of the host; then possibly suspecting treachery, the Ammonites and Moabites set upon their allies of Mount Seir; and the end was a furious fight and mutual extermination. Nothing was left for Judah to do but to come in and take the spoils. So the walls of Jericho fell down when the people shouted; so the stone from a shepherd boy's sling found the head of Goliath; so it has been thousands of times, and is now; wherever there is danger and people trust the Lord, the Lord keeps His promise, and delivers them."

"Where was it?"

"Not at Engedi. The multitude had climbed the cliff, and were in what is called the wilderness of Tekoa; a wilderness which lies to the westward of the Dead Sea. The word *cliff* in verse 16 should be 'ascent' or 'height.'"

"O Uncle Sam! couldn't we go there?"

"You would be afraid to go there, Tiny; the pass is a very wild one. It zigzags up from Engedi, along the face of precipices, very steep, a trial even to the horses. The marauding Bedouins from the other side of the sea still come by the self-same way; it is very good for them; but not for you."

"For us, Uncle Sam?" cried the boys.

"When we go to Engedi, you may climb the pass if you will."

"But the valley of Berachah?"

"Yes, that is within your reach, Tiny. We will go there. We can go and come back the same day, easily enough."

"So after that time Jehoshaphat had peace," said Priscilla. "The Lord made people afraid of him. 'His God gave him rest round about.' It's a wonder to me that people do not find out that the easiest way is to serve God."

The next morning was lovely and fair, like all the mornings lately. We set off early and rode first to Bethlehem; then down, or up, wadies that grew barren and drear, with steep gravelly sides. About four hours' ride from Jerusalem we reached the height of Tekoa, and dismounted and spread our carpets to rest and take our luncheon.

We seemed to have got into a different world from the one we had left at our camp. Here, high up on a rounded rocky ridge, we could look far and wide over a wilderness country. Around us were the ruined foundations of houses, covering a few acres; and some of the stones in them were large and "bevelled," Uncle Sam called it, in the old Jewish fashion. There was a ruined tower too, and above all, there were the remains of what had once been a church. A font of rose-coloured stone was still there, along with some broken columns; cisterns too, a great many, cut in the rock.

"I suppose," said I, "the houses, foundations, I mean, are old, and the church is new."

"New!" said Dan.

"Old and new are comparative," said my uncle. "Yes; these foundations may have been laid when Amos lived here and kept his sheep in the wilderness yonder."

"What Amos?" said Liph; and then we laughed at him.

"Amos?" said Liph. "But this was one of the places that Rehoboam fortified."

"And that Shishak took," said I. "Think! that the Egyptian army once lay all about here; and they scaled walls perhaps, and killed people, here where we are sitting among these peaceful ruins."

Now they laughed at me. "Perhaps the place capitulated without striking a blow," said Liph.

"I am sure these ruins do not look very peaceful, either," said Priscilla.

"At any rate, there were people enough killed hereabout in Jehoshaphat's time," said my uncle. "The king and his army had come as far as this wilderness; and

then, from the top of one of the heights, they could see where their enemy lay; the ground covered far and wide with dead bodies. Three days it took them to strip the slain and gather the booty; the fourth, they assembled in a valley among the hills about a couple of miles to the west of us to give the Lord thanks. *Bereikût* the place is called yet. The old name has not died out. *Berachah* means blessing."

We sat still for some time looking over the landscape. The wilderness of Judea, to the eastward of us, was specially interesting, thinking of David and of Amos the prophet, and what times they must have had among these wild, solitary, inhospitable hills and wadies. That way too, from the heights above the Dead Sea, the invading Moabites and Ammonites had come. It looked as if nobody had ever been there!

"When was this church built?"

"There was a considerable Christian community here in the time of the crusades."

"And how long has it been a ruin?"

"In the year 1138 a body of Turkish soldiers came against it. The people fled and took refuge in an enormous cave a little to the north there; a cave called now Khureitûn, that opens out of a wild ravine. The Turks sacked the place, and nobody has rebuilt it since."

"After all," said Liph, "if the Lord took such care of Jehoshaphat, why did He let all that army come at all to frighten him out of his wits?"

"Do you think it was want of kindness?"

"I don't," I said.

"I don't know," said Dan. "Why *should* they come?"

"To teach Jehoshaphat, and the people of his time, and us and the people of our time as well, a lesson."

"Couldn't it be taught any other way?"

"Not so well."

"What lesson?" said Liph. I think he knew, too, but Uncle Sam answered him. He made him read all the following passages, and then Liph was quiet.

Psalm xviii.; lx. 12; Isaiah xlv. 17; Rom. viii. 35–37; 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10; 1 John iv. 4.

After lunch we rode over to the valley of Berachah. It was a wide free space, with some ruins on one side. Here we stopped to read the psalms which were written on account of the grace God had showed Jehoshaphat. Psalm xlvi., xlvii. and xlviii. with Psalm lxxxiii. also, which some think may have been written by Jahaziel himself; he was an Asaphite.

On the way home, in the midst of all my delight at what I had heard and seen, I was also meditating questions; and so it appeared was Liph; for as soon as we were gathered with our Bibles after dinner he prevented me.

"Uncle Sam, here is something queer."

"What is it?"

"In 2 Kings i. 17 it is said that Ahab died, that is, that his son began to reign, in the second year of *Joram king of Judah*. In ch. iii. 1 it says he began to reign in the eighteenth year of *Jehoshaphat*."

"Quite right. Before Jehoshaphat went visiting in Samaria, he had made Joram his son co-regent with himself. So the second year of Joram and the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat fall together."

Liph pondered. "Then, sir, see 2 Kings viii. 16. How could Joram of Judah in that case begin to reign in the fifth year of Joram of Israel?"

"Then Joram of Judah began his undivided regency, his father giving the reins up to him some two years before his own death. All that fits, my boy. You can calculate at your leisure. But in calculating you must always take into account the Jewish manner of reckoning; according to which part of a year is called a year. The years of the reigns were counted from the first of the month Nisan. Now if a king mounted a throne but a day or two before, that day or two in Jewish annals would be reckoned a year; and so of a day or two after the first of Nisan, if his reign then came to an end. The reckoning of days is in the same way. 'Three days' means only parts of three days."

"Now I hope you have done, Liph," said Priscilla. "What is all this about Jehoshaphat and ships, in the end of 2 Chron xx.?"

"And in the end of 1 Kings xxii.?" I said; "Jehoshaphat seems to have made another mistake."

"So he did. Notice: 'there was then no king in Edom;' 1 Kings xxii. 47."

"Yes. What has that to do?"

"A good deal. You remember that at the head of the Gulf of Akabah was the port of Ezion-geber, from which in Solomon's time ships went to Ophir and brought home huge riches. Now this lucrative commerce had died. Ezion-geber lying just at Edom's southern extremity, unless there were peace with Edom or a weak state of government there, the Jewish sea-trade could not go on. The latter was the case now, and Jehoshaphat made an endeavour to restore the trade. Why did he not succeed, Liph?"

"I suppose there was a storm in the Gulf, and the ships were wrecked."

"Right; but how came the storm?"

Liph looked up, and my uncle smiled.

"You would say, if you said your thought, that the wind blew, I suppose. How came the wind to blow? Read verse 37 of 2 Chron. xx. The storm came, and Jehoshaphat's hopes and plans were defeated, because he was 'unequally yoked together with unbelievers.' He had done it before and not prospered; he tried it again and again to his discomfiture. I think this time he learned his lesson; for when Amaziah afterwards proposed to send some of his servants with those of Jehoshaphat, for another attempt, the king declined the offer. 1 Kings xxii. 49."

"How could a fleet set sail from Ezion-geber to go to Tarshish?" said Liph. "I thought Tarshish was in the Mediterranean, in Spain."

"In 1 Kings xxii. 48 the word is 'ships of Tarshish;' and that has, by a natural mistake, been held to mean ships going to Tarshish. But it seems that 'ships of Tarshish' was an expression for ships built to go long voyages; like

the English word *Indiaman.* So ships of Tarshish might be built at Ezion-geber to go to Ophir. When the Chronicles were written, all trade with either place was a long past thing, and the very geographical knowledge of the situation of them had passed away; so the error was natural."

"It says in 2 Chron. xx. 33, 'the high places were not taken away'—that means?"——

"The high places in honour of Jehovah. All the high places for Baal and Astarte were gone. Yet you see, the people were not heartily minded to serve the Lord. Do you draw the lesson, children, from all this story, that to have the Lord with you is the best way to success?"

"But, sir," said Dan, "do you know, people think, some people, that Christians do not get on well in business? not so well as other people?"

"Try it, my boy! That is one of the devil's lies."

"Now we come to Joram."

"Wait; we have not done with Jehoshaphat, Tiny. Find 2 Kings iii. 4."

"'Mesha the king of Moab was a sheepmaster,'—that's a very odd thing for a king to be!"

"The country of Moab is a very beautiful grazing country, and the people had large possessions of flocks and herds. So their tribute to the king of Israel was paid in kind. That was usual enough, and is still usual in Asia. See Isaiah xvi. 1, where Moab is counselled to pay tribute again. David had brought the Moabites into subjection; but it seems that after Ahab's defeat and death in his fight with the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead, they had withdrawn their tribute and were trying for independence. Now Ahab's son Jehoram wanted to bring them under again, and Jehoshaphat agreed to go and help him."

"Had he forgotten already what Jehu told him, after his coming back from Syria?"

"Probably he wished to punish the Moabites for their attempt against himself. That is the way, Tiny; men's wishes are what they follow."

"What should they follow?" said Liph.

"God's wishes. But Jehoshaphat was, as we know, an easy-going man; he could be persuaded. The two kings joined forces. Now get out your maps. Here, you see, is the land of Moab; a high table-land; only to be approached on the side of the west by steep, long ravines or wadies. Now there were two ways open to the combined armies. They might cross the Jordan a little above Jericho or a little below, at one of the fords, go up into the up-country, and cross the Arnon and so enter the land of Moab. Or they might go round the southern end of the Dead Sea, crossing the hot plain there, which is in part barrenness itself; in part it is very rich, where the streams come down from the mountains on the east, and the tropical heat makes, with the streams, another oasis like that of Jericho. There comes down a ravine from the south-east, which was the old boundary line between Edom and Moab; by that way the armies would come into Moab from the south."

"A very roundabout way," said Dan.

"For that very reason they would not be expected nor prepared for on that side."

"Could we go there and see it," I asked.

"I am afraid not. The place is too wild, and the people. When Mr. Tristram and his party went there a few years ago, they came to a ruined and burned village, just deserted, with dead bodies lying about. You would not like that, Tiny, and *he* did not. We must do as well as we can with the map and the best explanations I can make. Here at the south-eastern part of the little plain below the sea, you see the wady I spoke of; Wady es-Safieh, called higher up, Wady el-Ahsa. A little river comes in here just at the south-east end of the lake, the rills from which water that part of the plain and turn it into a thicket of fruitfulness. The wild broom grows there, the ziziphus, the apple of Sodom tree, and others: in open glades between there is some cultivation and might be much more. The place is excessively hot. Mr. Tristram represents it as full of birds. I wish we could go there, Tiny. Doves on every bush, he says; thrushes and bulbuls; a beautiful gay little bird

called the sun bird, and wagtails and other water birds among the water-courses. Probably when the armies of Syria and Judah went that way there was more cultivation and less wild thicket. From the little plain they would strike into the boundary valley, Wady es-Safieh, and follow it up; till some place was reached from which they could turn north and enter the Moab pasture lands."

"Where were they then when they were in such trouble for want of water?"

"They must have been in this Wady el-Ahsa, struggling along in the barren, rocky ravine. The stream which usually flows there was dried up."

"I think the king of Israel had some reason for his outcry," said Priscilla.

"I don't," said Dan. "They had chosen to go that way themselves."

"And the Lord had chosen that the river should be dry."

"Yes. Why did He?"

"Ah, children, when the kings got into trouble, then they remembered Him. That is very often why He lets rivers dry up."

"Elisha was conveniently at hand," said Liph.

"The Lord meant he should be."

"Why did Elisha pour water on the hands of Elijah?" I asked.

"To pour water on the hands is the office of a servant. Don't you recollect, the Orientals wash their hands after every meal and properly before every meal? Elisha was Elijah's servant; and at that time he was somewhere in the neighbourhood; so that the three kings could go themselves to him, to beg his help."

"He was very rude to Jehoram," said Liph.

"I think not. He reproved him, to make him bethink himself."

"What was the use of a minstrel? that sounds strange," said Dan.

Compare 1 Sam. x. 5 and 1 Chron. xxv. 1-3. You see there that prophesying and music used to be in close

alliance. How or why, my boy, I do not feel able to say. But notice, children, that the deliverance which followed was solely for the sake of Jehoshaphat."

"When was the 'time of the meat-offering'?"

"Look at Exod. xxix. 39–41. At that propitious time, when that which symbolised Christ's offering was presented in the Temple at Jerusalem, help came."

"'Water by the way of Edom—'" said Liph. "Where did it come from?"

"That is simple. Far away upon the mountains of Edom in the east or south-east there had been a violent storm and rain-fall; now the filled torrents came pouring their floods along, down the Wady el-Ahsa and every other wady in that direction."

"And, I suppose," said Dan, "the Moabites came irregularly and carelessly, thinking the game was in their own hands."

"I suppose so; and so followed a terrible retribution upon them. The usual mercy shown even to an enemy's land, see Duet. xx. 19, 20, was not to be observed here."

"Why not, sir?"

"Moab and Edom were special types of the hostile foes who trouble the existence of the spiritual Israel; and in them, as indeed in the case of all the enemies of Israel of old, the sure sign is given of the final destruction and overthrow of all the foes of Christ and His Church. 'I will curse him that curseth thee.' 'No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.' 'His enemies shall lick the dust.' I might quote many another word of the like. But I want you to notice, children, the hint given in verse 20. 'It came to pass in the morning when the meat offering was offered,'—at the completion of the sacrificial service held in Jerusalem, far away,—it was *then* that the floods of water began to pour down the valley. So cometh every unseen help and unexpected deliverance now, in secret connection with the place where our High Priest is always appearing for us and presenting His perfect offering."

"O Uncle Sam! that's lovely," Priscilla exclaimed.

"What made the red shine on the water?" said Liph. "Sunlight isn't red."

"Either the red earth of the fresh opened trenches, or possibly the reflection from crimson clouds upon the water. You will remember, the Moabites knew that everything was perfectly dry, and had no intimation of the storm down in the mountains of Edom; so they were the more easily deceived."

"Then there is another thing. Where is Kirhareseth?"

"Moab's chief city. It is called Kerak now. If we were standing on the brow of the cliffs overhanging Engedi, we could look across the Dead Sea and at the head of a straight ravine running back into the Moab hills we should see Kerak and its castle."

"What castle?"

"Built in the early part, or middle, of the twelfth century."

"Crusaders," said Liph. "The Israelites must have gone a good way into the country, according to that. What could *slingers* do against a town wall?"

"Slingers of big stones, from some sort of battering ram or engine for throwing stones. Hard pressed, the king of Moab offered a dreadful sacrifice to Chemosh his god."

"And why was there great indignation against Israel?"

"The words express divine indignation, and cannot be interpreted to mean indignation of the people of the land, or any other. It means, the divine displeasure which is brought down upon a man or a people by his wrong doing; and I confess, children, I am at a loss how to understand it here. I do not understand it."

CHAPTER X.

JORAM TO ATHALIAH.

"Now we come to Jehoram's reign," said I the next evening. "Short and bad. And such a good man's son!"

"Such a bad woman's husband," said my uncle; "and that is more to the purpose. In his first act he reminds us of many a prince of the Ottoman Porte in later times. His six brothers were put to death, perhaps because they were better than he, as the prophet said; and he feared, or Athaliah feared, interference or opposition from them. Some of the princes of the people were got rid of also, presumably on the same grounds; and then his way was clear. He introduced the Phœnician Baal worship, built the high places for Baal and Astarte, see 2 Chron. xxi. 11, and so led the people away from God again."

"But they ought not to have been led."

"Quite true; but the influence of a king and his court is usually found powerful in a country, whether for good or for evil. Especially for evil. So he 'caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication;' that is, to go after false gods. In the Bible the relation between Christ and His people is likened to that between a husband and wife, for its closeness and tenderness and the sacred bond of the covenant which binds them together. So when His people forsake Him and ally themselves with false gods, it is called by the same name of disgrace and wickedness as the act of a woman who leaves her own husband and goes to live with another man."

"And that is why Jesus so often calls Himself the Bridegroom," said Priscilla.

"Not only that; but His calling Himself so was as much as to say to the Jews that He was the Great One who years

before had announced Himself to them under that name. Turn to Isaiah liv. 5, and read it.

"O Uncle Sam, how beautiful that is!"

"Now Hosea ii. 19. Then Psalm xlv. Then Rev. xix. 6–9, and xxi. 2."

"How beautiful everything is in the Bible," said I. "Now I understand a great many things; all those parables. And the Jews must have understood."

"What is this about 'a light' to David, in 2 Chron. xxi. 7?"

"It seems that the old Hebrew custom was to keep a light always burning in the house at night. So if the light was gone out in a house, that meant that there was nobody left to keep it up."

"And just for David's sake Jehoram was not destroyed?"

"*He* was destroyed; his reign ended soon and shamefully; but his family was not cut off like the family of Jeroboam and of Jehu and other offenders against the Lord. But to the country disaster followed upon disaster. The Edomites revolted, and Joram could not bring them under, 'to this day;' that is, to the time when the account was first written."

"What account? and what is the difference between the books of Kings and Chronicles?" Dan asked.

"A thoroughly pertinent question, my boy, but just now it would interrupt us. Let us go on with Joram. In 2 Kings viii. 21, we have the account of his unsuccessful attempt to subdue the Edomites again. It seems from the words in 2 Chron. xxi. 9, that Joram was hemmed in by the enemy, that he made a desperate effort by night and cut his way through, upon which his army disbanded itself and every man went to his own home. Then Libnah revolted."

"Where was that?"

"A city of the Philistines, in the plain, a few miles to the west of Beit-jibrin, where we were the other day. But the name has disappeared, and all certain knowledge of the spot."

"The next thing is the letter of Elijah," said Liph. "I would like to know how it comes that here is a letter from him to Joram, when in Jehoshaphat's time he went to heaven?"

"How do you know he did?"

"Elisha was the prophet in that case, when the three kings went after the Moabites; Elisha, 'which poured water on the hands of Elijah.'"

"*That* fact proves nothing."

"But in 2 Kings ii. Elijah's ascension is told of, and in 2 Kings iii. the going out against the Moabites."

"And *that* proves nothing. Don't you know that it is a very common thing for the Scripture history to go on to a certain point, and then stop and go back to bring up details. But you forget another thing. It is certain that we do not know the year of Elijah's translation. It is nowhere stated. So he may have been on the earth after Jehoshaphat's death. Or the matter may be very simply explained in another way."

"Supposing he *had* been translated then?"

"Yes; supposing that. Do you recollect, when Elijah was at Sinai, what commissions were given to him regarding Jehu and Hazael?"

"I remember," said Dan. "He was told to anoint Jehu to be king over Israel and Hazael to be king over Syria."

"Did he do it?"

Dan hesitated and answered, "No, sir."

"Who did it then? Turn to 2 Kings ix. 1–3. Fourteen years after the commission was delivered to Elijah, the commission was executed by the hand of a messenger sent by Elisha; while Elisha himself delivered the message to Hazael. If Elijah handed over these two charges to his servant and successor, it is very simple to suppose that the case of Joram of Judah was a third like instance. The sin of Joram and his punishment being revealed to Elijah years before, he may have committed the letter concerning him also to Elisha, to be delivered when the time came. It would be still more impressive as coming from the great

prophet of Israel. But it does not appear to have wrought any good to Jehoram. The name of Elijah must have had a certain terribleness even for Athaliah the daughter of Jezebel, who could not but remember the sacrifice on Mount Carmel and the four hundred prophets of Baal."

"I suppose, if they had repented, the punishment would not have come," said Priscilla.

"At least not in its full weight. However, it came."

"And the Philistines and Arabians did like Shishak, and conquered the land and took Jerusalem," said Dan.

"They overran the land, a good deal of it, breaking into the cities, and carrying off booty; but they did not get into Jerusalem."

"Why, sir, it says they 'carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house; and his sons, and his wives.'"

"The word translated 'substance' means any kind of property. See 1 Chron. xxvii. 25. And the king's house, here, is held to mean not the king's palace but his family. So the invaders carried off all the possessions of Joram and his family that they found in fortresses and towns and fields. And see 2 Chron. xxii. 1. The invaders had come *to the camp*, it is not said that they came to Jerusalem; and Athaliah was left at least, and Joram's youngest son with her. Even so, the blow was heavy enough. This came upon Joram for slaying his brothers. And then disease took possession of him, and his end was miserable."

"It says, 'the Lord stirred up against Jehoram, the spirit of the Philistines'?"——

"Yes. Using, no doubt, some such ministry as he had used to induce Ahab to go to Ramoth-Gilead."

"That seems strange, Uncle Sam."

"It need not, my child. Also the actual infliction of disease comes by the immediate agency of Satan and his ministers; as I told you before. Only the Lord reigns and rules; and nothing can touch anybody when He forbids."

"And they would not bury Joram in the burial place of the kings."

"And made no burning for him. Either on account of the disasters of his reign, which made him unpopular, or because of the manifest displeasure of God which rested upon him. 'He departed without being desired;' *i.e.*, no man cared for him, no one mourned for him."

"Ahaziah's little reign comes next. He was not any better."

"All this time the influence of the Phœnician court and religion flowed like a great wave over both kingdoms, of Israel and Judah. Jezebel had her way in the northern kingdom, and her daughter Athaliah followed in her steps in the south. So Athaliah's son Ahaziah 'walked in the ways of the house of Ahab,' as her husband Jehoram did before him."

"How old was he? Here it says forty-two, and in 2 Kings viii. it says twenty-two."

"If he had been forty-two, he would have been older than his father. There is a numerical error, a scribe's error, probably."

"There is nothing much more about him, except his death," said Dan; "but the account of that is all mixed up, one way in Kings and another in Chronicles. I cannot make it out."

"No necessary confusion, however," said Uncle Sam. "Only the very brief narrative in each place, giving a point here and there without the connection."

"I don't see how they could be connected. One story says one thing, and the other another."

"Both true, I reckon," said Uncle Sam. "Let us see. Ahaziah had joined forces with his uncle to fight Hazael. Badly wounded, Joram came back to Jezreel to his mother to be healed or to die; and there Ahaziah, his nephew, came to visit him. We can see that the connection between the two families was very close. While Ahaziah was there, came the tidings of Jehu's approach on his mission of vengeance; and the two kings ordered out their chariots and rode to meet him."

"What sort of chariots?"

"Like nothing of nowadays. A sort of little box, with the front corners rounded and the back out, set upon two wheels; the sides low, and probably, like the chariots of Egypt, where these were no doubt made, provided with a bow-case on one side and a quiver of arrows on the other. These quivers and bow-cases were made very ornamental. In this little box of a place one man stood to drive, and the warrior, or the great personage, stood to fight. There was a pole to the chariot, and two horses harnessed before it. The whole was a very stylish affair, too. Well, Joram was stricken down by Jehu's arrow, and Ahaziah turned and fled; and got, we will suppose, to Samaria. Jehu, having done his work in Jezreel, pursued after Ahaziah; meanwhile Ahaziah's attendant princes and kinsmen were brought to him and also slain, 'sons of the brethren of Ahaziah;' therefore nephews and cousins more or less removed. Ahaziah himself then being sought for and found and brought to Jehu, Jehu commanded to slay him also in his chariot; which was done at the place mentioned, a little south of the edge of the great plain; and then the charioteer drove on to Megiddo as the nearest place, or the safest. Or it might have been that Ahaziah was wounded at the first time, mortally, and only ordered to be despatched when brought back to Jehu."

"'So the house of Ahaziah had no power to keep still the kingdom;' what does that mean?"

"There was no heir left to assume the government. The way was free for Athaliah's usurpation. However, she strengthened herself still further by making an end of the whole seed royal of David, so far as she knew; and then had things her own way for six years more."

"Then there was only a little one-year-old baby left, of all the family of David."

"That was all; a little child, with his nurse, kept in one of the chambers of the Temple, hidden from anybody's knowledge, under the care of his aunt and her noble husband Jehoiada. This is what had come of Joram's marriage with the daughter of Ahab. The Lord's command

in 2 Cor. vi. 14 is good, and sorrow comes to the people who transgress it."

"Was this aunt of Joash, Athaliah's daughter?"

"Not possible. A daughter of Athaliah would not have been allowed to marry the high priest, nor would Jehoiada have taken her. She must have been a daughter of Joram by one of his other wives. The room where she hid the baby and his nurse in the first place, while the massacre was going on, was not a bed-chamber in our sense, but the room where the beds were kept. You know what sort of beds are used in the East; in a common house there is a large recess in the wall somewhere, that is used as a store-place by day for the *lewans*, thick comfortables and the like, which at night are taken out and unrolled and spread down, as many as are needed. In the king's house, naturally, an entire room would not be too much for such a store-place; and it was there, under or behind the piled up quilts, that Jehoshaba hid her little nephew. Afterwards she got him into her own house."

"Uncle Sam," said Liph, "the account of Jehoiada's conspiracy is not alike in the Kings and Chronicles."

"Conspiracy!" said Priscilla.

"We generally use the word in a bad sense. Never mind; the thing done here was noble and finely carried out. Jehoiada was a noble man altogether. As to discrepancies in the two accounts, we must remember that the compilers of them both took their materials from a more detailed and full statement, each using the facts that specially suited his purpose. That there should be gaps and differences, is what might be justly expected. But there is no troublesome disagreement."

"Jehoiada was in a hurry," said Liph. "A child six or seven years old could not reign."

"He might be murdered, though, if by any chance Athaliah got knowledge of his existence. And meanwhile, every day of Athaliah's rule was making things worse. Now let us see if we can understand the whole story. Read 2 Kings xi. 4 and 2 Chron. xxiii. 1-3."

Dan read them.

"Jehoiada sent first, you see, for those five captains of the royal guard mentioned in verse 1; men whom he knew. In a secret meeting in the Temple he told them his purpose, showed them the little king, and engaged them to help. Whereupon these five went out through the land, privately holding interviews with some of the chief nobles and the Levites, enlisting them all in the plan and appointing an assembly at Jerusalem on a certain day. On that day they were there, and Jehoiada took an oath of them and received their covenant of allegiance to the house of David. Then he unfolded to them the details of his scheme. Priests and Levites were the only force he was sure of."

"Who are those 'entering in on the Sabbath,' verse 4, Chronicles?"

"I was coming to that. You know, David had divided the whole body of priests and Levites, now grown into many thousands, and arranged them in classes, twenty-four classes, or 'courses,' which served each in the temple a week at a time. So every Sabbath one course went out, and one course came in."

"Now the high priest's plan was this. One third of the course coming in should guard the entrances of the Temple, that is, of the Temple courts, as usual. In the Kings, verse 6, 'the third part at the gate behind the guard,' or 'the gate of the runners,' corresponds to this. See verse 19 in Kings; you see that gate was plainly the grand entrance-way from the royal palace to the Temple; to 'keep the thresholds,' means specially to watch and guard against any interference or approach from that quarter. 1 Chron. ix. 19. Another third should be 'at the king's house.' Now this could not mean the royal palace; there were no hindrances there to Athaliah's leaving it when she desired to do so. It must mean the house in the Temple enclosure where the little king was living. *That* was to be surrounded and guarded specially by the one third of the incoming 'course' of priests and Levites. Then the last division was to be posted at the gate *Sur* or *Jesad;* both names mean the

same gate, but it cannot be certainly determined which gate it was. The word means 'foundation gate;' so it must have been a gate of the outer court; the principal and important one, no doubt, by which a hostile force might enter."

"Then who are 'all the people,' Chronicles, verse 5, who were to be in the courts of the Temple?"

"See Kings, verse 7. They were the two divisions of the outgoing 'course,' which were to take their posts about the little king; be his body-guard that day; and let no one pass their ranks. Chron. verse 7. And over these five divisions, it appears, the five officers of the royal guard took the command, possibly mingling with them some of their own soldiers on whom they could rely. But inasmuch as they could not bring weapons into the Temple without exciting suspicion, Jehoiada furnished them with consecrated weapons, which had been in the house of the Lord since David's time. See 2 Sam. viii. 7."

"But those were shields of gold? and Shishak had carried away all the treasures."

"Manifestly, these were not shields of gold, but trophies of war, shields and bucklers and spears, too ordinary to tempt the Egyptian king, offerings of David's thankfulness and memorials of God's goodness. So armed, all the divisions took their posts, from the right wing of the Temple to the left; 'round about the king' does not mean about his person; for till these dispositions were made the little six-year-old king was not brought out and shown to the people."

"Well, there were other people there besides priests and Levites," said Liph. "See Chron. xxiii. 6."

"There were the princes who had been summoned, probably with more or less following, and people who may have come unsummoned to worship. When all the guards were posted, the courses of the priests and Levites just relieved taking place about the king in the inner court and those who had come to relieve them guarding all the principal outer entrances; the nobles and other people

keeping their place and not pressing in where they had no right to go; then the high priest brought out the little king, and set him, not 'by the pillar,' for that is not the sense of the word, but *on* a raised platform at the east end of the inner court; most likely it was the same brazen scaffold that Solomon had made, you recollect; see 2 Chron. vi. 13, and it was occupied by the king on great occasions; as you see by the words 'as the manner was' in 2 Kings xi. 14. And for *where* it was, see Ezek. xlvi. 1, 2. There stood the boy, in the midst of the solemn assembly, a little wondering child, while Jehoiada and the priests his sons poured the anointing oil on his head, and then crowned him, and delivered into his hand 'the testimony.' That is, a copy of the book of the law written out for him, and no doubt wrapped in a handsome case made for it."

"What was that for? it is mentioned both in Kings and Chronicles."

"It was the rule. See Deut. xvii. 18, 19. By the words of this book the king was to regulate all his doings and government. All this, so far, you can imagine done in solemn silence. But now came the burst of music and shouting together; clapping of hands, cries of 'Live the king!' Then the Levites who were the Temple musicians blew the trumpets for joy and the other people blew their trumpets, and probably the priests brought out the two sacred silver trumpets which were sounded on the greatest occasions and blew with them."

"No wonder Athaliah heard it."

"The royal palace was not far off, and you remember Solomon had made a grand way of approach from it to the house of the Lord, across the Tyropæan valley. That entrance was guarded; but either Athaliah in her hurry came unattended and the guards let her pass, or she slipped in by some other entrance; for in she came and took the view of the whole."

"'Have her forth without the ranges'—what is 'without the ranges'?"

"Without the ranks; therefore, outside of the Temple

courts altogether. So they drew her along back over the great entrance way, as far as the gate which led to the royal stables, and there they slew her. This was not the 'horse-gate' spoken of in Nehemiah; that was in the wall of the city; this was close by the palace."

"Then came the covenant. I suppose that was something like the covenant Joshua made with the people in his time. What was the use of their making covenants? they always broke them."

"The good kings, or priests, I suppose, always hoped they would not. Like our good resolutions, children. They are, as Dan says, no use."

But they all cried out, "No use, Uncle Sam. Would you rather we did not make good resolutions?"

"What is a good resolution?"

"Why, a purpose, a fixed purpose, to do right."

"The Bible does not bid us purpose to do right."

"Doesn't it?"

"Nowhere, that I know. It bids us *do* right."

"But suppose one cannot?"

"Then what is the good of your resolution? But the very mischief of good resolutions is, that they presuppose that you *can* keep them. It is far better to do, than to resolve to do."

"How can one do without resolving to do?"

"The 'doing' I mean is heart surrender. After such a transaction, the 'doing' comes easy, for we have the Lord's strength instead of our own. However, in national affairs, public covenants to be the Lord's are undoubtedly proper, as also in affairs of individuals. See how Moses made one with the people, Deut. xxix. 1–15—and Nehemiah, Neh. ix. 38, and x. 28, 29—Jehoiada made two covenants; one between the king and the people, and one between them both and the Lord. See 2 Sam. v. 3. In the former, the king vowed to rule the people according to the law of the Lord, and they promised allegiance to him. The other was a renewing of the covenant made in Moses' time. See Exod. xix. 5–8—xxiv. 1–8; Deut. xxix. 10–15. By that covenant the people bound

themselves to be true and obedient. Look at Deut. xxvi. 17–19. They had broken that compact, and not once nor twice. Now, you see the first thing they set about after renewing it was to destroy every token of the worship of Baal."

"Uncle Sam, *they* had not made the covenant in Moses' time. It was their great-great-great-grandfathers, or further back yet."

"Well, what then?"

"I don't see how they were bound by it."

"Do you notice Moses' words in Deut. v. 3, 4?"

"Yes, sir."

"How could he say that? The generation that had stood before Sinai were all lying in their graves in the wilderness. No, my boy; nations remain the same nations, though the individuals change; even as our bodies remain the same bodies after seven years have displaced and renewed every particle of their substance. So God reckons with nations as long-lived individuals."

"If they change, sir, how can they be the same?"

"By the law of development inherent in each one, according to which it differs from every other and remains identical with itself. The same with national character, and with the bodies of men. But this is a rather deep subject, children; let us go on."

"Uncle Sam, in Chronicles, verse 16, it says Jehoiada made a covenant between *him* and the people?"

"As the Lord's high priest. He made it for the Lord."

"Then, Jehoiada 'appointed the offices of the house of the Lord'—what is that?"

"He restored the whole order of the Temple service and worship which had been interrupted; set Levites and priests in their places again, as servants and guardians of the house; as they had been appointed in David's time. Door-keepers, musicians, officiating priests, all as they ought to be. And then, after Athaliah and her followers were got rid of, he brought down the little king in solemn and joyful procession from the house of the Lord across the grand way over the

Tyropœan, into the palace that Solomon had built. There were the soldiers of the king's guard, all of them now, in helmet and shield, with halberds. There was a large company of nobles and princes, many of them no doubt glittering in white dresses; and finally a procession of the common people who followed. So the brilliant line went out of the Temple court by the 'gate of the runners,' over the viaduct, and wound about to the court of the palace on Zion hill, into the grand hall of judgment, which no doubt was the audience hall, in front of the dwelling part of the palace; and set the little king upon the seat of Solomon's magnificent throne."

"I thought Shishak had taken all Solomon's beautiful things away?"

"He certainly took all the portable things; and I cannot affirm that the golden lions on the steps of that throne escaped; let us hope they did. At any rate, little Joash was placed upon the throne of the kings."

"A bad place for a little fellow to be."

"Not so long as he had such a good uncle to stand by him."

CHAPTER XI.

JOASH AND AMAZIAH.

"I THINK we have not to go anywhere for the reign of Joash," said I the next evening. "So it will not take us very long, Uncle Sam, will it?"

"I never know beforehand, Tiny, how long anything will take me. But this reign is not complicated. There are only a few main facts to be noticed. The first is, that for some twenty-five years, Jehoiada, the good high priest, was the real governor; or at least the beneficent tutor of the king; and so long as he lived things went outwardly well."

"Only outwardly, Uncle Sam?"

"There was no heart in it, Tiny. It was only while Jehoiada lived, that Joash was good and the people kept the covenant. It was as in the days of Isaiah—'This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men'"——

"But Isaiah was not living?"

"Not preaching till a hundred years later. But Jehoiada was living: and the force of his character, and the gratitude and perhaps affection in which Joash held him, and the power of his goodness, were the life of the kingdom so long as he lived. It seems that he even chose the young king's wives, quite according to Oriental custom, to be sure; yet it shows his importance."

"But the high places were not taken away" said I.

"That is said in 2 Kings xii. Keep your Bible open there, and have your finger between the leaves at 2 Chron. xxiv., so that we can refer from one to the other. No, the high places were not taken away. That is, the high places for the illegal worship of Jehovah. Hardly any king was power-

ful enough or energetic enough to put those down. But there was no idol-worship."

"It says, Chron. verse 4, that it was the idea of Joash to repair the Temple," Liph remarked.

"No," said Priscilla, "it only says 'he was minded' to do it. That might have been Jehoiada's doing."

"I do not understand exactly about all this money, Uncle Sam."

"Chron. verse 5, 6. The king ordered the Levites to go through the land and make a collection, *the* collection ordained by Moses. See Exod. xxx. 11–16. When the first census was taken, and every man of twenty years old 'passed over' to those that were numbered, a small tax of half a shekel was to be paid by each one as a 'ransom for his soul.'—The word comes from a root which means to 'cover,' and might be translated in English an 'expiation,' and the idea is, that the thing by which the atonement is made *covers* the sin of the person for whom it is made; or if you will, *covers* the person. So that God looking on him sees only the covering, and not the sin. See Psalm lxxxv. 2, and cxxxii. 9."

"What sin was to be covered for every one when a census was taken?"

"No one particular transgression, but the general unholiness and unsoundness. By this ordinance the children of Israel would be perpetually reminded that God would take no account of them without a 'covering' between. The money paid was simply an earnest and figure of a better ransom-price. Every year this tax was due from every Israelite over twenty years old. It was this tax which was applied for, Matt. xvii. 24, 'Doth not your Master pay *the two drachmas?*' so it ought to be."

"And he said the children ought not to pay," said Dan.

"Ay! The children,—they that are cleansed and forgiven and at home,—they need no more covering but the one that has been spread over them, once for all; no more than they need to pay tribute. But to come back to the Temple. In Kings, verse 4, there are three sorts of taxes

specified. 'Money of every one that passeth,' that is, *passeth over to those numbered;* then 'the money that every man is set at.' Look at Lev. xxvii. 2, and Num. xviii. 15, 16. A man might vow himself to the Lord, either in prayer for some favour or gratitude for some deliverance; but without the meaning of dedicating his life to the Lord's special service. Not to do that, he must be redeemed; and the redemption-money was according to the priest's valuation of him. A man so much; a woman so much; an old man or a child, less. This money and the money tax paid for the redemption of the first born, all came under this second head. Then we have 'the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring.' Now read Kings, verses 5, 6, and Chronicles, verses 5–7."

"What had Athaliah and her sons done to the Temple?"

"We are no further told. They had taken the precious vessels for Baal's service, and all the moneys paid into the Temple; and they had let the Temple services and all care of the building and its courts cease for years. The house was one hundred and thirty years or more old now, and might in any case need repair; and it would seem that they had wickedly committed voluntary demolition and damage besides."

"'But the Levites did not hurry,'" said Liph. "Kept the money for themselves, I suppose."

"Not in the least likely, and no sign of it. No; they applied the moneys received only to the usual sacrifices and services, and were not energetic enough or in earnest enough to set about the repairs. So a new plan was instituted which had admirable success. Read now the rest of it."

"Where was the chest put? I don't understand."

"On the right side of the altar, on the outside of the gate; that is, by the south entrance into the court of the priests and just without the entrance."

"Then who was the 'king's scribe'?"

"An officer whose business it was to draw up public documents. Another officer's business was to write the annals of the kingdom. From time to time, as the chest

grew full, the high priest or his servant, together with the king's scribe, came together, weighed the money and put it up in bags. You must think of the money as in rings of silver, such as had been in use in Egypt from time immemorial; no doubt in Babylon and other countries also. Not being coin with an authentic government stamp, it had to be weighed always when told out in quantity. I suppose they weighed out a certain sum and tied it up in a bag; and afterwards reckoned the bags. We read of 'purses' as containing a certain value amount among the Easterns in later days; and to this time, a payment made by the Sultan of Turkey, if made in a hurry, will come on the shoulders of slaves in bags of coin and jewels."

"So they 'put it in bags and told it,'" said Dan. "I see."

"Moreover, proclamation was made throughout the country, of the money that was required and for what it was required; and the people were glad and offerings flowed in; so there was more than plenty for the work."

"Uncle Sam, in Kings it says the money was not used for bowls and vessels and furniture, and in Chronicles it says it *was*."

"Ah, Liph! that is the way people make blunders. Don't you see? None of the money was used for such purposes *until all the work of repair was done;* after that the surplus was so applied, as stated."

"What was the trespass-money and the sin-money?"

"Look at Lev. v. 15-19. This repair of the Temple, and refitting and refurnishing it, and new establishing the service of the house upon its old scale and in its old regularity, was a great work. But now turn to Chronicles, and read verses 15, 16."

"Why should Jehoiada be buried among the kings?"

"Really, he had been a regent of the kingdom for years, and still for succeeding years the king was guided by his advice. He died full of honour and regard; and then, the influence of his goodness was swept away like the leaves of autumn. Read on to verse 22. First came a petition of the

"Yes, it does not sound like Stephen's words," said Dan, "or like Paul's words; Acts vii. 60 and 2 Tim. iv. 16."

"Or like our Lord's own words. But two things are to be taken into account. In the first place, the prophets of old, inspired by the Holy Spirit, delivered not their own but the Lord's mind and purpose. So David, in psalms that puzzle some people very much. He was the organ of the Lord's judgments. In the next place, that dispensation was to make known the lesson of law and justice. Till that lesson is learned, there is no place for mercy, and mercy would not be understood."

"But, Uncle Sam, I am sure the Lord was merciful to the people in those old times too?"

"Most true, Tiny; the Old and the New Testaments are noways at variance. 'I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment, which ye had from the beginning.' And yet, John goes on to say that in effect it *is* a new commandment; 'because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.' However *meaning* love and salvation to them, the Lord's lesson to the people in the former times had to be that 'the Lord God of recompenses shall surely requite.' Jer. li. 56. The people had to learn *A* before they were ready for *B*."

"In Matt. xxiii. 35, the Lord said, look, Uncle Sam,—speaking to the Jews of that day—'Zacharias, whom *ye slew*'?"

"That is what I told you a little while ago, of the oneness of national life. The individuals change; the nature and organic life, the *law of development*, remain the same; so that it is the same nation."

"Zechariah's curse, or prophecy, came soon true," said I. "Before a year was over. Read Chron. verse 24. That was as it had been foretold them from the beginning. See Lev. xxvi. 25, and Deut. xxviii. 25, 48."

"Poor people! Was there a battle?"

"Of course; a battle in which all the leaders fell. Hazael's forces went down along the plain and took Gath, which was one of Rehoboam's fortified places, you know;

nobles to be permitted to introduce the worship of Baal and Astarte again; granted, in his weakness or his wickedness, by the king."

"Why should they wish it? I cannot conceive. What would they gain by that?"

"Licence for evil, Prissy. Don't you know yet, my child, that men do not relish a pure and spiritual religion? neither in those days nor in these days. Only love can keep the law; how should folk who have no love of God in their hearts bear a law which forbids what they like, and commands what they have no appetite to? 'The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God; *neither indeed can be.*'"

"But how was it possible for Joash to treat so Jehoiada's son? his own cousin?"

"Cousins were of not much account in those days. I cannot tell, Prissy. The princes 'conspired' against Zechariah; it is possible, as has been suggested, that they filled the king's ear with false reports concerning him, and so got leave to kill him. They seem to have been prepared and ready. For they chose a strange time and place. Zechariah was standing 'above the people;' that is, on the platform of the inner, higher court, possibly in the gateway between it and the court of the women, from which he would look down as from an elevated position upon the crowd gathered below; and standing there he rebuked them. And they stoned him there, in the inner court, driving him back from the gateway, perhaps, with their stones; there on the marble so often wet with the blood of their sacrifices. They must have brought stones with them from outside. Between the Temple and the altar he fell and died. And according to Jewish tradition the stain of his blood could never be cleansed away."

"I am puzzled about one thing," said Priscilla.

"What can that be?" said Liph. "Maybe it is what puzzles me."

"You are very often puzzled by what does not trouble me at all," returned Priscilla; "but this is something I do not understand. What Zechariah said. It looks like revenge.'

"Yes, it does not sound like Stephen's words," said Dan, "or like Paul's words; Acts vii. 60 and 2 Tim. iv. 16."

"Or like our Lord's own words. But two things are to be taken into account. In the first place, the prophets of old, inspired by the Holy Spirit, delivered not their own but the Lord's mind and purpose. So David, in psalms that puzzle some people very much. He was the organ of the Lord's judgments. In the next place, that dispensation was to make known the lesson of law and justice. Till that lesson is learned, there is no place for mercy, and mercy would not be understood."

"But, Uncle Sam, I am sure the Lord was merciful to the people in those old times too?"

"Most true, Tiny; the Old and the New Testaments are noways at variance. 'I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment, which ye had from the beginning.' And yet, John goes on to say that in effect it *is* a new commandment; 'because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.' However *meaning* love and salvation to them, the Lord's lesson to the people in the former times had to be that 'the Lord God of recompenses shall surely requite.' Jer. li. 56. The people had to learn *A* before they were ready for *B*."

"In Matt. xxiii. 35, the Lord said, look, Uncle Sam,—speaking to the Jews of that day—'Zacharias, whom *ye slew*'?"

"That is what I told you a little while ago, of the oneness of national life. The individuals change; the nature and organic life, the *law of development*, remain the same; so that it is the same nation."

"Zechariah's curse, or prophecy, came soon true," said I.

"Before a year was over. Read Chron. verse 24. That was as it had been foretold them from the beginning. See Lev. xxvi. 25, and Deut. xxviii. 25, 48."

"Poor people! Was there a battle?"

"Of course; a battle in which all the leaders fell. Hazael's forces went down along the plain and took Gath, which was one of Rehoboam's fortified places, you know;

and then was about to come to Jerusalem. The army was beaten; there was nothing to withstand him, and Joash was fain to strip his own house and the Temple treasures to buy him off."

"If there were such treasures already in the Temple," Liph objected,—"things that Joash and his father and grandfather and great-grandfather had dedicated, what need of all that fuss made about a collection for repair of the Temple?"

"Jehoiada would not have suffered the consecrated things to be used for such a common purpose, when other means were at hand. Consecrated things might not be taken back, Liph. See Lev. xxvii. 28."

"And then Joash himself made a bad end; he had 'many diseases,' too, before he was murdered."

"That should read, 'many wounds.' He was badly handled in the fight against the Syrians; and was lying sick of his wounds, when two of his servants, sons of foreign women of the race of his enemies, slew him."

"They did it for his behaviour to Zechariah."

"Those words may give only the Lord's purpose, and the chronicler's view of the transaction. At any rate, to him no more than to his grandfather were the royal honours paid at his funeral. Jehoiada was laid in the sepulchres of the kings, but Joash not."

"And now we come to Amaziah," said Priscilla. "Twenty-nine years of another half-and-half reign."

"Half and half?" said Liph. "He was a good king."

"In what?" said Priscilla. "It says, he did exactly like his father in all things; and I am sure Joash was not good."

"Well, very few of the family walked 'with a perfect heart,'" said Dan. "Yet it does say, 'he did right in the sight of the Lord.'"

"Have your Bibles open at the two places, Kings xiv. and Chronicles xxv., for one account supplements the other. Amaziah began right, that is all you can say; outwardly right; and ended all wrong; like his father in both facts.

The first act of his reign that we hear of was an act of justice, and not, as was often done among other nations, pushed beyond the limits which the law of Moses had set. See Deut. xxiv. 16. This he did as soon as he felt himself strong upon his throne. The next thing was an undertaking to reduce Edom to subjection, which had revolted, you remember, in Joram's time. For this, Amaziah summoned his men at arms, organised and arranged and numbered them, and found he had not men enough. See Chronicles."

"There were almost twice as many in his great-great grandfather's time."

"Ay; you know a very great host had lately been given into the hand of the Syrians, and there had not been time for the losses to be repaired. So Amaziah hired a band from the north to help him."

"And I *don't* see why he might not keep them and use them," cried Liph. "They were only hired soldiers. Why people never ask nowadays what sort of men they enlist."

"The question here was not of individual moral character. It was that old vexed subject, Liph—'Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.' The Israelites were practically heathen."

"Judah was not much better."

"It was better, as a nation and as a government. They still formally kept their allegiance to their divine king. Israel had formally thrown it off."

"But I should think the Ephraimites might have helped Amaziah to fight," said Dan.

"It would not have been help. That is the very thing. The Lord's blessing was not on them nor with them. And so it is in all unholy alliances. The human promise may be fair; but the Divine seal is wanting. No good comes of it."

"I don't understand verse 8 of Chronicles."

"It is hardly intelligible as it stands. An ironical meaning is not possible to the Hebrew words; and it is supposed a scribe's error may be here, and that it ought to read, 'If thou wilt go, do, be strong for the battle: God will *not* let thee fall.' Then the king was in trouble for his money."

"How much is a hundred talents?"

"Computed at something less than two thousand dollars."

"But that is no sort of pay for a hundred thousand men!"

"It is to be remembered, that in those times there was always the hope of making booty. And the hundred talents may have been only first-money, an earnest of more, paid in hand. It was a good deal to Amaziah, we may see. However, in this point of his history he believed the Lord's message and trusted the Lord."

"It seems hard to trust the Lord for such a thing as money," Dan remarked.

"People often find it so. A business promises well, a partner in trade offers brilliant advantages, or perhaps the work in hand is a man's only means of getting bread for himself and his family; the one trouble is, that it cannot be carried on, or cannot be accepted, without slighting some one of the Lord's commandments. It is hard then sometimes, Dan, to believe that 'man shall not live by bread alone;' or this word of the prophet here, 'The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.' I was talking with a poor fellow the other day, who was employed by the keeper of a livery stable and obliged to spend Sunday largely in driving people about. Conscience had laid it on him that he ought to keep that day holy; and if he refused to drive he would be turned off; and 'what should he do?' the man asked me wiping the tears from his eyes ever and again as he spoke. 'My master is a Christian,' he said, and repeated, as if that fact took away all hope."

"Why, Uncle Sam?"

"He would not be likely to respect in another the scruple that he stifled in himself. Or perhaps the man rather meant it as an item in the account which confused his calculations; as happens to many a one. But let us go on. Amaziah believed for once anyhow; and see how the Lord justified his confidence. He always does, children; always. Look at Deut. viii. 18; Ps. xxiv. 1; Phil. iv. 19."

"Now, Uncle Sam, where is the valley of salt?" we asked, when we had read all those passages.

"You know where Mount Seir lies. Look at your maps. Here, at the lower end of the Dead Sea, just before you come to the border of Edom, is a little plain, some ten miles deep, encircled by higher ground and cliffs on three sides. Here, beginning before you reach the end of the sea, on the west, is a long, low-lying ridge, do you see it? coasting first the sea and then this little plain, for a length of seven miles. It is solid salt, covered with an overlying crust of marl some fifty feet thick. Salt gives to the weather, you know; and in spite of its covering of soil, the rock salt is worn into peaks on the top and fissures and caverns on the sides; from which there is a constant trickling and filtering of water in little runs and springs that almost make a marsh of the western portion of the plain. It *is* a marsh in places, with a treacherous salt crust under which a laden camel has been known to sink in and disappear. On the eastern side, there come fresh springs and runs of water from the mountains of Moab and from Edom, and feed that part of the ground into the richest fertility, down to a certain line by which the sweet water drains off to the sea. All on the western side of the line is barren and salt and drear. To the south the plain is shut in by a range of low cliffs, shining white in the sun, through which break in different places the water-courses that pour their way from the long valley of the Akabah, which borders Mount Seir down to the Gulf of Akabah. This way, you see, Amaziah would come to reach Edom. Here, at the south-east, runs in the wady es-Safieh, which was the border line between Edom and Moab. Hither, you remember, Jehoshaphat came with the kings of Israel and Edom to conquer Moab. This plain was, and is, the valley of salt. And here the Edomites met Amaziah, and the battle was fought."

"And ten thousand Edomites slain."

"That was not all. They took Selah. Where is Selah?"

"That is the capital city of Edom, Petra. I wish I could take you there, but it is too wild. It was a wonderful city, built in a wonderful enclosed valley or basin of rock; wild rock walls mounting on every side from the basin; and the

houses were partly built or cut into the rock. Some of the remains are very beautiful; all are vastly curious. It is a rock city still in its loneliness. Amaziah's victory in the valley was so decided that he was able to press on, two days' journey farther into the mountains, and take this strong place. Selah means 'the rock.' He took it 'by war;' and you see, made many captives, as well as no doubt gathered great spoil."

"And where did they throw those captives down from a rock?"

"I cannot tell. From some high precipitous cliff, it must have been."

"It was very cruel!"

"The world was not at a merciful age just then. Also, it must be remembered, Edom was the life-long enemy of Israel; its sons could hardly be made slaves of, like the captives of other nations. I suppose the soldiers of King Amaziah did not know what else to do but to pitch them over the rock and get rid of them."

"So Amaziah did not need the band of Israelites whom he sent back," I remarked.

"Trouble came to him, though, by following the prophet's counsel," said Liph.

"How?"

"The Israelite soldiers were angry, and so did things for which they had to be punished; and so came Amaziah's downfall."

"Not so. It came because he brought Edomite gods home with him and bowed himself down before them."

"How could he, Uncle Sam?—how could he, when he had just had proof how good the Lord was to him?"

"And how strong to deliver," added my uncle. "It is strange, Tiny. It shows how half heathen, wholly dark, the mind of the king was. He believed to a certain degree in the God of Israel; but he believed there were other gods too. Each nation was supposed to have its own; and it was a wide-spread notion that to conciliate the gods of a people was a good measure towards enabling a foreigner to

keep them subject. Alas! people make the same blunder in our times."

"How, sir? we don't believe in other gods."

"Don't we? Not gods called Chemosh and Molech, I grant you. The gods we conciliate are called 'Public favour,' 'Social position,' 'Wealth,' and 'Distinction,' and the like. And to secure the ends we drive at, do we not fancy that means must be taken to enlist these on our side? Do we think the favour of God and His help are quite enough without such aid?"

"But what is the harm in such aid, sir?"

"The harm of confidence drawn away from God, concessions made which are displeasing to Him, and the eventual coming to grief of our hopes."

"People succeed, sir, by the help of money and distinction and position, and so on."

"Apples of Sodom"—— said my uncle.

"What are they, sir?"

"Fair-looking fruit, with nothing but a little dust inside. They grow on the shores of the Dead Sea. But if you want to know what 'success' means, Liph, study the first psalm. Let us go on with Amaziah."

"I do not see what he meant by his message to Joash."

"'Come, let us see one another in the face?' A good deal the same that a bullying boy means, when he squares his elbows and shouts, 'Come on!'"

"Well, the answer of Joash, Uncle Sam?" said Priscilla. "I think I know what it means, but I am not sure."

"The thistle here is rather the *thorn bush*. Don't you see? The thorn bush was both silly and arrogant; and the power that dwelt under the cedar of Lebanon made a contemptuous end of him."

"And so it was!" said I. "After God had helped him to overcome the Edomites, Amaziah could be so foolish! But what puzzles me, Uncle Sam,—look here in Chronicles verse 20,—it says, 'it came of God.' How could Amaziah's folly come of Him?"

"When people are fools in heart, child, the Lord very

often lets them be fools in action; so that their folly may be, if not its own cure, at least its own reward. The whole philosophy of the thing is in that 20th verse, Liph."

"Where was Bethshemesh?"

"Down on the border between the territory of Dan and the territory of Judah, close by the seaside plain, not very far from Beit-jibrin where we were the other day."

"Could we go there?"

"With all my heart. We will go to-morrow. And as it will be a ride of seven or eight hours, we will stay there over night."

CHAPTER XII.

AMAZIAH AND UZZIAH.

We made an early start the next day, and followed the same road we had taken, to go to Beit-jibrin, for some hours; until we came to the big terebinth in the Wady es-Sur. Porter tells of this great tree, and says it is one of the finest of its kind in Syria. It is the *Elah* of the Old Testament; and the valley of Elah, half an hour off, into which this wady opens, was accordingly the "valley of the terebinth." Here the road from Hebron to Joppa crosses this one from Jerusalem to Beit-jibrin; and we left the latter, going on down the Wady es-Sur. Presently we left that also, crossing a ridge into another wady, called Wady Mûsurr, and then up another ridge to Beit-Nettif. From there we went up and down again, over some wild country, and got into a valley at last (rough enough the going down into it was, too), which we followed. This valley was cultivated in the bottom, but the sides of it were left in a wild condition; and beyond and above them, on the northern quarter, the masses of the mountains of Judah looked over. Down this valley we went till we got to Bethshemesh; and then we were very glad to stop and pitch tents. I took a camp chair and fed my eyes on all about me, while the others of our party were more usefully busy.

It was a beautiful place! We had mounted a low rising ground, the end of a ridge, from which rose a little tell, level on top, all covered with ruins. Broken and heaped up ruins, bits of old walls and quantities of stones and rubbish; nothing more; no crusader's castle or Roman fortress. Never mind; here *had been* the old town of Dan, to which the kine brought the ark from its captivity among the Philistines. And the men of Bethshemesh were reaping

corn in the valley. I looked to see where. On one side of the ridge where I was, lay a great wady, Wady Surar; and on the other side a smaller one. Below Bethshemesh the two run together and form a wide valley which passes out to the plain. That way the kine came! and down here in Wady Surar, no doubt, the reapers were in the corn-fields. The wady is wide, near a mile across; on the other side another long ridge stretches out towards the plain, higher than the one where we were; and on the top of it I saw a little white spot; one of the Mohammedan welys one sees so frequently. The foreground of my picture, the ridge where I was sitting, was very rough and wild; all stones and remains of the thistle harvest Mr. Porter speaks of as covering it in spring. The weather, however, was lovely, and the associations of the place dressed it out for me in beauty and grace and dignity.

"Well, Tiny!" said Uncle Sam, coming beside me. "Tired, my child?"

"I don't care, Uncle Sam."

"Ah, you are the right kind of traveller. The country is something to you. How much can you make out?"

"Not *very* much. The ark must have come up that way from the plain; and the reapers must have been down there in that valley, I suppose. What is that little white building on the ridge beyond?"

"Only a *wely;* but it stands where Zorah stood, where Samson was born. All this country that we see was his special home. The valley between Zorah and where we are sitting was most likely the valley of Sorek, where Delilah lived. A mile and half to the west of us, but hidden by some higher ground, is where Timnath stood; and Ekron is about three hours away in the plain."

"Then the battle between Amaziah and Joash must have been, where?"

"Perhaps below in the valley of Sorek. Or more likely, a little to the west of us, where the two valleys come together and make a wide level, running out to the great plain."

"What made Joash come such a roundabout way? how came they to meet down here?"

"For a large body of men, it might well be the easiest and shortest way, to follow the seaside plain to some point near here, and then make a quick rush up to Jerusalem. In the plain, too, supplies and booty might be had by the way. The history tells us just the bare points we need to know; but you can see, Tiny, that there were manifest advantages offering themselves upon this course. Amaziah came down hoping to stop him."

"And it was a regular rout," said Dan, who had joined us. "Every man ran home as fast as he could. Oh, but stop and rest, and let's have dinner, and talk it over by and by."

I was obliged to agree, and went into the tent and had a good sleep. Then we had dinner, as the day was getting towards the end, on the ruined height of Bethshemesh. The view was lovely over hills and valleys; the air dry and sweet.

'I always think of the hills now as witnesses," I remarked. "They are the only things left unchanged; and they almost speak to me."

"I suppose there was a neat little town here in Amaziah's time," said Priscilla; "where there is nothing but rubbish and dry grass."

"Dry weeds," said Dan. "Worse than that."

"In Amaziah's time, all that we see was smiling with cultivation. Orchards, gardens, corn-fields, vineyards, olive groves, wherever you could look. And neat little towns, not only here but on every height, stood around the battle-field where Judah got such a blow."

"And Amaziah went home as a prisoner!"

"And had to be quiet and bear it when Joash beat down a great piece of the wall of Jerusalem. What for did he do that?"

"It made the city defenceless. Any enemy could walk in. The place which he broke down was on the north side, the only side, that and the north-west, where the wall is not defended by deep valleys; the side on which hostile armies

have always attacked the city. The *Ephraim gate* is thought to be the same as the gate of Benjamin; it was in the midst of the north wall, on the road north; and the *corner gate* was six hundred feet to the west of that. All that stretch of wall Joash broke down."

"Couldn't Amaziah build it up again?"

"Joash drained off his remaining treasures and left his finances bare."

"I should think the people would have taken hold and built it up with their own hands."

"People don't do such things, unless they have a great leader. Every one for himself, is the selfish rule of the world. Besides, Joash took away hostages. As long as he held them, his will had to be respected."

"*That* was what Amaziah got by serving the gods of Edom, Liph."

"Joash died soon, that's one good thing."

"But Amaziah never repented!"

"How do you know?"

"Read Chronicles verse 27. I do not quite understand it though, all of it."

"His apostasy gave rise to displeasure and discontent in the city. This feeling must have smouldered a long while, for Amaziah lived fifteen years after the death of Joash; but it is evident that the king never appeased the discontent of his people, nor got the forgiveness of God, who was so gracious to him. So he made a miserable end."

We were silent awhile, the boys studying, and I looking at the landscape. Hills and valleys lying so peacefully still under the light of the sinking sun; and once the cry and the shout and the clash of weapons and the whole storm of war had rolled over them. *Once?* How many times? And then came to me the words—"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." So with the land, it might have been.

"Uncle Sam, we have done with Amaziah; let us go on to Uzziah. Why is he called by two names, here one thing, and in other places another?"

"Both names are used too frequently to allow us to suppose it was an error. The king bore both names. The reason perhaps is, that both mean the same. Uzziah means 'whose strength is Jehovah;' and Azariah means, 'in Jehovah is help.'"

"Good for him," said Dan. "'As long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.'"

"Good for anybody," said Uncle Sam. "Uzziah proved its truth for many a year of his long reign; and accordingly his kingdom grew to a pitch of power and prosperity which it had not known since Solomon's time. Let us take things in order. First,—Chronicles xxvi. 2—'he built Elath.' That is, he fortified it. Now do you know where Elath was?"

"At the head of the Gulf of Elath, or Akabah," said Dan.

"It was a port of Edom. So it is plain that Uzziah finished what his father began in the subjection of the Edomites, or at any rate maintained his advantage. As he built Elath, so no doubt he made use of it for purposes of commerce; and this one fact speaks for the strength and stability of his government."

"Next thing. In 2 Kings xv. it says he began to reign in the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam. Amaziah, his father, lived fifteen years after Joash, Jeroboam's father. So Uzziah must have begun to reign in the *fifteenth* of Jeroboam, or sixteenth."

"An easy mistake of a scribe's spelling, that's all, my boy. Go on."

"Next come his wars.

"Not next after his successes over the Edomites. Those are mentioned first, as proving the strength and prosperity of his reign. But in what order his victories were gained, we cannot tell. It is certain, for instance, that he did not prevail over Edom and the Ammonites and the other tribes in that quarter, until after Amos prophesied; and Amos prophesied, it is believed, somewhere about Uzziah's tenth year. The king's warlike enterprises are mentioned to-

gether, without regard to order of time; they made one feature of his reign. Judah had been very much beaten and broken down; now with Uzziah began a gradual recovery, which lasted and grew into the longest time of prosperity and splendour which the southern kingdom ever knew. It continued through the two reigns of Uzziah and his son. It seemed like a last effort of the Lord's goodness to win the people back to Himself. It was the last."

"Why, I thought the people and the king were so true to the worship and service of Jehovah?" Dan said.

"Formally, not in heart. The high places were not taken away at all; and you know how readily at every invitation of a bad ruler the people fell into open idolatry. See what Amos said; chap. ii. 4, 5."

"That gives one quite a new view," said Priscilla.

"Still, for the time, outwardly, the king followed the Lord's commandments; and the Lord gave him success and power. The Philistines must have been pretty thoroughly subdued, when Uzziah could build cities in their territory. Gath was off here in the plain, not far from where we are. Ashdod nearer the coast. Jabneh lies yonder, some four hours south of Joppa. The three cities were taken by storm probably, and their fortifications beaten down."

"Then where is Gur-baal?"

"Nobody knows. Maan, however, is on the borders of Edom, east of the Dead Sea; and the 'Arabians' are the wild tribes of that same region probably, or of the desert south of Gaza. The Ammonites submitted to Uzziah. His name and power spread far and wide. And all because 'God helped him,' Liph."

"I don't see that he was very good, either, sir."

"As a ruler. And as head of the kingdom he honoured and served Jehovah alone. There was no turning to idols in his reign. So far was true and real. And the Lord says, 'Them that honour me, I will honour.'"

"Would you like to have our government do like that, sir?"

"Do like what?"

"Like Uzziah. Would you like to have it allow no churches but Christian churches all over the land?"

"We have received no such command, as the people of Israel had. *Our* orders are to make disciples of all nations; which again was not their business, and is not to be done by force. But I would that our government honoured and served the Lord only, Liph, if that is what you mean. It would be a good day for the land!"

"Then Uzziah fortified Jerusalem. I suppose he built up all the wall that Joash broke down."

"More than that. He built towers at the corner gate, and at the valley gate; that is, on the north-west and west sides, where the city is not so well covered by ravines. These towers were for the defence of the gates against assault. Soldiers posted in them and on the battlements could send flights of arrows upon the heads of the attacking party; stones, fire, whatever they had. 'At the turning,'—that was the angle where the south wall of Zion joined the wall of the Temple hill; a tower there looked to the defence of the south-east quarter. He made them strong."

"Then in the desert. Where is the desert?"

"Probably, the uninhabited pasture land around Beersheba; the same country where Abraham and Isaac pastured so many flocks. It is only a rolling grass land, with no settlements or boundary lines, or trees, or runs of water. Water is scarce everywhere, and only to be had by digging wells. There Abraham dug wells, and Isaac, and now Uzziah."

"What had become of all the old ones?"

"Filled up, more or less. That happens easily if the well is not kept covered, by the action of the driving sands. Towers were needed for defence against the wild tribes of the desert, lawless and violent then as now. Jerusalem itself would not be safe but for its walls. A few years ago the Convent of the Cross, not two miles to the west of the city, was broken into by some of those same lawless rovers, and the superior murdered. Uzziah had flocks and herds in other parts also. The 'low country' is the seaside plain,

the Shephelah; and the 'plains' mean the level table-lands east of the Dead Sea, which once belonged to Ammon. That part of the country, between the Arnon and Heshbon, had been the property of the tribe of Reuben. Reuben had lost it, the Ammonites had probably regained it, and now Uzziah had dispossessed them again. The power of the northern kingdom was waning and would give Judah no more trouble. Judah, on the other hand, was coming into her last period of pride and splendour."

"Uzziah was a great husbandman," said Dan.

"He extended his power and riches and throve every way. Carmel is that long ridge of high land stretching from the mountains of Samaria north-west into the sea. The name means 'fruitful fields'; the ridge is eighteen miles long and near five broad; woody hillocks and grassy vales. Another feature of this reign was the regular organisation of the army."

"What is this 11th verse—'by the hand of Jeiel the scribe,' and so on?"

"It means this. Hananiah was one of the high officers of the army. The numbering and organising of the military force of the kingdom was committed to him, with two of the king's household officers, experienced in writing, to make the lists under his supervision. The forces, you see, were not only organised but thoroughly equipped."

"I understand shields and spears and helmets and bows; but what are 'habergeons?'"

"Some sort of coat of mail. The Egyptians wore a kind of tippet, or square piece with a hole in it for the head to pass through, covering the shoulders and breast; this is the hauberk or habergeon. It was of scale armour; and below it, to protect the rest of the body, was worn a kind of corselet, made of iron hoops, or scales. Between the one and the other piece of armour, it is supposed Ahab was struck; 2 Chron. xviii. 33. The habergeon is the same piece called elsewhere the breastplate; in Egypt it was made of leather, or of brass, or of iron; and it is likely Uzziah's armour, if not obtained from Egypt, would be

made on the same pattern. Goliath is described as going out in such armour, with a 'breastplate of scales.'"

"Such a dress would bruise and cut the flesh, I should think."

"A thick undergarment was always worn to prevent that."

"Then what sort of 'engines' are these he made in Jerusalem?"

"Something like the Roman ballistæ and catapults. The Assyrian ballistæ were very high, made of wooden frames covered with skins or felt to protect them, and provided with some sort of machinery by which a number of heavy stones could be discharged at once and with great force. These ballistæ were mounted upon a bank of earth or inclined plane for the purposes of a siege; for the purposes of defence, no doubt, Uzziah planted them upon the walls of the city. The catapult was for throwing darts; the ballistæ for stones."

"So Uzziah 'was marvellously helped, till he was strong,'" said I.

"But meanwhile, what did the Lord see in Judah, under all the outward splendour and prosperity? Read Hosea's words, chap. vi. 4, and viii. 14, and verse 10."

"'Remove the bound.' What is that?"

"Remove the landmark. In that land, where fences are not the fashion, the boundary lines of property are marked by large stones, sometimes partly sunk in the soil. To 'remove the landmark,' means, or indicates, injustice, violence, and oppression, don't you see? Find Deut. xix. 14; xxvii. 17. And Hosea xii. 1, 2; where you see the prophet is declaring judgment against both the houses of Israel."

"Hosea seems to be most concerned with the northern kingdom."

"So he was. He was commissioned to announce the evil which was coming upon Israel; but you see the Lord was viewing both kingdoms as more or less involved in the same departure from Him. The Lord had a controversy with Judah; it was preparing even now, in this time of peace

and prosperity which He had granted them and they had abused. All the goodness He could see in Judah was a passing thing. And the clouds were gathering, though not above the horizon yet, which would swallow up all the bright day of those two reigns of Uzziah and Jotham. Probably Joel had already declared his message. Scholars are not agreed on that point; nevertheless it seems likely that he had prophesied a little before Isaiah."

"Who was Joel?"

"Just the son of Bethuel; that is all we know; except that he was a prophet of Judah, and a very grand one."

"He did not write much," said Liph. "Three little chapters."

"There is a great deal in those three chapters."

"What was his 'message,' Uncle Sam?"

"To declare the Day of the Lord."

"But I thought, the 'day of the Lord' meant the time when Christ will come and judge the earth."

"Quite right, Tiny; it does mean that. But there have been times and times upon earth in the history of the Church which symbolised that 'day' and gave a preliminary earnest of it. Times when sweeping destruction came upon the faithless nominal people of God, through which the true hidden people were saved and delivered. The flood was such a day; the conquest of the Assyrians in Israel and of the Babylonians in Judah was such another; the destruction by the Romans was another. Joel announced the great fact of judgment, which should come, wave after wave, until the final great flood of it should be upon the earth. It is as if he saw the breakers and heard the roar, without being able to distinguish accurately between one and another. That seems often to be the manner of prophecy."

"I can understand that," said I. "I will read Joel."

"You will not understand him," said Liph. "He writes about locusts."

"He writes, or prophesies, about destruction; of which the locusts may have been one instrument, but are much rather the terrible figure. Read chap. 1, verse 4. The words

translated palmer-worm, locust, canker-worm, and caterpillar, are all names for the one creature—the locust. And they do not and cannot mean, either, different stages in the life of the same insect. So the prophet's words indicate one destruction following upon another."

"Might be one flight of locusts following upon another."

"No, for one flight of locusts never comes to eat what a former one has left. There is *nothing* left. 'A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness.'"

"Then what enemies did Joel mean?"

"He calls them, chapter ii. 20, 'the northern army.' Locusts never come into Palestine from the north. He means, the Assyrians and Babylonians in the first place."

"But they came from the east, sir."

"Travelling up the line of the Euphrates and crossing the desert high up, where it is narrow so that they came down into Syria and Palestine from the north. That was their course always."

"Then in the second chapter there is beautiful promise too," said Priscilla.

"Beautiful promise, but for the times beyond the destruction, and for the remnant who should turn to the Lord. Then, in the last chapter, comes the declaration of the last, final, great Day; the Lord's harvest of His people; His judgment of the heathen and the Church. '*Then* shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more.'"

"Uncle Sam, the people of Judah heard Joel say all this?"

"All this and much more."

"And they paid no heed to it?"

"They did not like it. Moreover, they did not believe in it. Assyria had never threatened Judah, as yet; and Babylon was not yet an independent kingdom; not lastingly so. They knew no northern army to be afraid of. Israel's power was declining. And Joel's words passed like smoke.

Now, in Uzziah's time, another man was growing up, living somewhere in Jerusalem, and getting ready to be a greater messenger than Joel. That was Isaiah."

"I think it is altogether a sorrowful story. Uncle Sam. Uzziah's heart was 'lifted up to his destruction.' It is so strange!"

"It happens every day, Priscilla. Human nature does not change. Look at Deut. viii. 11–14, and Prov. xvi. 18. Prosperity is dangerous."

"I don't see, though, why Uzziah wanted to burn incense."

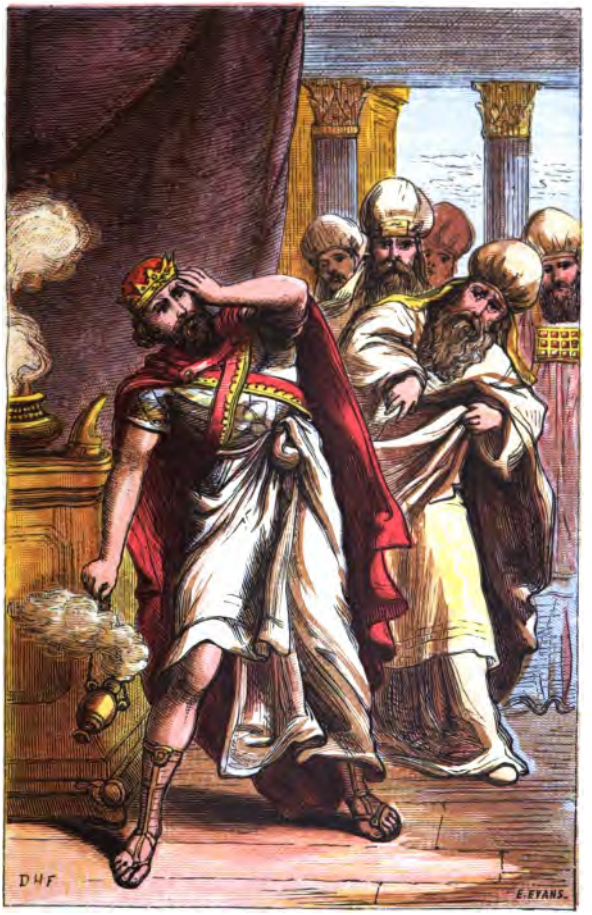
"Pride. To burn incense was an office reserved for the priests. Read the story in Num. xvi. You see there the same restless ambition at work. Uzziah desired to be head of the Church as well as head of the state; according to the manner of other nations and their princes. But see the ordinance, Num. xviii. 1–7."

We read the passage, and Dan remarked that it was a wonder Uzziah dared as he did.

"He must have forgotten," said I. "He was not like David—'Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee.'"

"So he died a leper, and lived ever so long a leper, 'in a separate house,' and when he was buried he could not even be buried with his forefathers."

"Because he would have defiled their graves."



"He transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense."

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CHAPTER XIII.

ISAIAH'S COMMISSION.

"ARE we going on to Jotham now?" I asked the next evening.

"Presently. There is something to be noticed before we do that. In the year that King Uzziah died, a very notable thing happened. Isaiah received his commission."

"What commission?"

"Wait a bit. Let us look first at what he says about the true condition of things in Judah. We have seen how the kingdom prospered; we have seen how faithful outwardly the government was to the law of the Lord; we read how the Lord helped the king; we are ready to think surely all was going on well. In the north Israel was tottering to its downfall; Amos and Hosea had already proclaimed it; but Judah had taken a new lease of prosperity and splendour and power."

"Well, sir! Hosea and Amos had had a word or two to say about Judah too."

"Let us look at another word or two of Isaiah. We shall find that with prosperity and power had come in luxury; and with luxury, what usually attends upon it; pride, lawlessness, and alienation from God. Open your Bibles at the book of Isaiah, and read the first four verses."

We obeyed and pondered the words.

"'Gone away backward!'" said I. "The history does not read like that."

"The history gives you an external view. Here you have what the Lord saw beneath the outside."

"Sir," said Liph, "the fifth verse does not fit. The nation was not stricken in Uzziah's time.

"No. So this description refers to a later time, either in

the reign of Ahaz or in that of Hezekiah, when the state of things was as here described. Whether this prophesy of the first chapter of Isaiah was given now by vision, or at one of those other periods when the words were historically true, does not matter to us, and scholars are not agreed. Historically true they are, whether written before or after the fact. What I want you to notice now is the mention made of the inner state of the nation. Read from the tenth to the fifteenth verses."

"I see," said Dan. "They kept up the public services, but it was all outward work; no heart in it."

"Even the solemn meeting was *iniquity*," I said.

"They made many prayers, and yet their hands were full of blood."

"And you see by the seventeenth verse," Dan added, "that wrong and oppression and cruelty were practised, and nobody tried to hinder."

"Sir," said Liph, "if the Lord did not like sacrifices, why did He order them? See the eleventh verse."

"See the thirteenth verse too. Did He not like incense, and Sabbaths? But He likes no form of approach to Him which is done with the hands or the lips merely. Sabbaths were for a sign between God and His people; but not Sabbaths of sinful idleness and quarrelling. Incense was the type of Christ's intercession, and so it was sweet before God; but it ceased to be a type of anything or to have any fragrance when it was offered by proud hands. And blood was the appointed symbol of the death of Christ, by which God would reconcile the world unto Himself, and which should cover all the sins of the penitent believer; but sacrifices brought by those who were impenitent and unbelievers became mere butchery. How could God be pleased with that?"

"See the twenty-first verse," said Dan. "Whenever was Jerusalem 'faithful' and 'full of judgment?'"

"In David's time, and in part of Solomon's time. Then Jehoshaphat wrought reforms, you remember, and it was more or less true in his time. 'Now murderers.' That

shows how wild and lawless society had become. See verse 23."

"And then come promises too," said I.

"Yes. All through Isaiah's utterances, there comes the promise breaking through the clouds of judgment. It is the promise to the remnant of the true Israel, which should be saved out of the ruins of the false Israel, and develop into all the glory foretold, with the Son of David for their king."

"Christians!" cried I.

"'If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' But often, children, there was a nearer and literal fulfilment of the promise of deliverance, which served as a figure and earnest of the distant and spiritual fulfilment. Again and again, in the history of the people of God, there comes this saving of the true few through the destruction of the false many. So it will be when Christ comes the next time. But go on. Read Isa. ii. 12–17. You see the Lord's judgment upon the pride and luxury which was prevalent. Uzziah's fortified ramparts come in for a rebuke, and his ambitious ships of trade."

"But is commerce a bad thing, sir? and are fortifications wrong?"

"Both did mischief to the kingdom of Judah."

"But for us, Uncle Sam?"

"You are asking a big question, my dear. You must recollect, it is the typical *people of God* to whom these words apply. And Jesus said that it was merely possible to the almightiness of God, that a rich man should be a true follower of Him. Anything that inclines us to depend upon ourselves, or to live to ourselves, is so far dangerous. Go on, and see what the prophet said about the dainty dressing of the ladies of his time. Isa. iii. 16–23. Along with this luxury in private life, see verses 14, 15, there went malpractice and hardheartedness. Now read chap. v. 1–7. And if you want to know what were the 'wild grapes,' sour and harsh, which the Lord found instead of good fruit, read verses 8, 11, 18-23. There was grasping greed and ambition; there was

drunken and revelrous feasting; there was scorn of Him, perversion of the truth, self-conceit, bribery, sensual pleasure-taking."

"What is the meaning of verse 18?"

"The allusion, as shown by the Hebrew words, is to the draft of a freight waggon. People have yoked themselves to the burden of sin, with its fruits, which they are drawing after them with cords of 'vanity;' or of 'lying,' it may be rendered. Do you see? With false reasonings and perversions of the truth, they have bound themselves to drag after them this load of sin and guilt."

"But what a different view of everything this gives, from the account in the Book of Chronicles!"

"They had 'forsaken the Lord,' they had 'provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger,' they were 'gone away backward.' If this had not yet all come out into open day as it did a few years later, it was there nevertheless in their hearts; and the Lord saw it. And so, in the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah received his commission."

"What commission? to prophesy?"

"Let us read and see. Read the sixth chapter."

I read four verses, and stopped.

"A vision of the glory of Christ," said my uncle, "which words are too feeble to describe. But you can understand, Tiny, the wonder of glory and beauty, the majesty of the King's court, the crowd of heavenly attendants, the song of praise, the house filled with the smoke of incense; till Isaiah in his sinful humanity thought he must die at the sight."

"I thought you said, incense meant Christ's intercession," said Liph.

"In the service of the Tabernacle. But it was also used as a giving of praise or worship. Men burnt incense to idols, with only a vague idea of service and propitiation."

I read on to the seventh verse, and stopped again.

"The incense was always kindled on coals brought from the great sacrifice altar; and the typical fire that burned there burned away all our uncleanness, yours and mine,

Tiny—when Christ died. Go on. Now comes Isaiah's commission."

I read to the chapter's end, and paused then more puzzled than ever.

"I do not understand his commission, Uncle Sam."

"It was the saddest possible. To tell the people that their day of forgiveness was past. To warn them of the judgments coming, which it was too late now to avert."

"But this—'Hear ye indeed, but understand not'—how is that?"

"God would leave them to themselves; and that would be all the same as making their ears heavy that they could not hear."

"'*Lest* they see with their eyes.'—Did not the Lord want them to see?"

"Not now. Find Jeremiah vii. and read verses 13–16, and verses 25–27. And then Prov. i. 24–31."

We read, and were silent.

"This was Isaiah's commission; to preach to ears that would not hear, and tell them that they were left to themselves, and the coming judgment sure and inevitable. And in his sorrow and dismay of heart, for he loved his people dearly, you can hear him asking mournfully, 'Lord, how long?' How long must it be so?"

"And the next words prophesy the captivity, don't they? The captivity, and the return," said Dan.

"It has been truly said, these words are a summary of the history of Israel for all time. First, no doubt, accomplished in the captivity and the return of a small remnant from Babylon. Then look at the little handful of believers saved and the overthrow of the nation at the time of Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans. Then see the Lord's prediction of how it will be at His next coming: the few that belong to Him gathered out of the false Israel, from the four winds of heaven; the overthrow and sweeping away of the rest; and the final return of the saved remnant to 'inherit the earth.' And before that last fulfilment, and as a type of it, the remnant of the lineal Israel

will come back as believers to take possession of Palestine again."

"Isaiah had some comfort in knowing that," said I.

"Perhaps he did not know just *that*, as I have detailed it. But he knew the promise for the remnant of Israel; and that promise is for ever breaking through, like a sun ray, the clouds of threatening which hung over the people; till towards the last of the prophet's life, the sunshine seemed to make head against the clouds, and his utterances became full of Messiah and the glories of His kingdom."

"I am glad he had so much comfort, at any rate," said I.

"He needed it. For he stood, as has been said, at a turning point of Israel's history. With the death of Uzziah, or very soon after, ended this last long day of prosperity and glory for the nation. The gleams that came after came in the midst of dark times. Now, if you like, we will take a look at Jotham. But let us notice one or two other facts as we go. In that year that King Uzziah died, Romulus was born."

"The beginning of the Romans!" cried Dan.

"Rome was founded a few years later."

"So, before Assyria and Babylon had done *their* work, the nation's other great enemy was getting ready!"

"Come back to Jotham," said Liph. "We are a long way from the Romans. There isn't very much about Jotham, anyhow, that I see."

"There is not very much. Let us take the account in Chronicles. Jotham began to reign, that is, to reign alone. For some years previous he had reigned jointly with his father. And in general, he carried on what his father had begun. It was the last clear sunshiny day of the nation's history; and even that began to be shadowed towards its close. We see that Jotham went forward with the fortifications of Jerusalem; that he built more towns and towers for protection of his herds and husbandry; and in the one war of which we are told, he was successful."

"Uzziah had received tribute from the Ammonites," Dan remarked.

"Evidently the Ammonites had refused it to Jotham. So he compelled it; for three years at least. Then it seems to have ceased. Perhaps Pekah and Rezin were beginning to make trouble, and the Ammonites took advantage of their opportunity."

"He built the 'upper gate of the house of the Lord,' it says in Kings."

"That was the northern gate of the innermost and highest lying court; it seems the sacrifices were killed there; Jotham probably beautified it. On the whole, we see that this king prospered, like his father, because he held fast to the God of Israel."

"And yet, Isaiah had got such a commission, Uncle Sam?"

"The people did not remain faithful, my dear. You must fancy in all this reign the state of things described by Isaiah. The people rich and luxurious, and in their pride and luxury neglecting or oppressing the poor. You must imagine rich houses and costly furniture; you must suppose ladies' attire and adornments exceedingly costly and dainty and rich; fancy banqueting entertainments, carousing and feasting in the palaces of the wealthy; and with that, the cause of the poor unheard or misjudged and their earnings beat down; a lawless greed of gain and pride of power; jeering at the warnings of Isaiah and Micah, false reasoning, self-dependence, gluttony and drunkenness. All this; and in the midst of all this the figures of the two prophets, in their dress of coarse goats' hair, by their very appearance saying that they had nothing in common with the world of their time; startling and incensing those that heard them. Imagine them, coming forward when people were gathered in the Temple courts or anywhere else, and lifting up their voices in such a cry as Isaiah's, 'Hear, O heavens; and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me! . . . Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, children that are corrupters! they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger.'—Or

fancy Micah crying—'Evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem. . . . Make thee bald and poll thee for thy delicate children: enlarge thy baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity from thee.'"

"Did they, Uncle Sam?"

"Did they what?"

"Go into captivity."

"Ay, did they, and in the very reign of Ahaz to which we are coming."

"But I do not understand. Why 'make thee bald and poll thee'?"

"A sign of mourning, Prissy. Like black ribbands and crape nowadays. Look at Job i. 20; Isa. xv. 2; xxii. 12."

"But why 'make thee bald *like the eagle*'? eagles are not bald, are they?"

"No. And this is not an eagle, though the word is always translated so in the Bible. It is the Hebrew *nesher* and Arabic *nissr*, which never means an eagle proper, but the griffon vulture; the great vulture. Look up over yonder to the south-east; there are two or three of them at this moment, circling about in the air."

"A vulture!" said Dan in disgust; "that is a vile bird."

"This is not. It is nothing like our common vulture, and no more a bird of foul habits than the eagle is. Eagles will not kill their prey if they can have it killed for them. The griffon is the eastern type of all that is kingly and powerful and noble. Nisroch, the Assyrian god, was depicted with the head of a griffon. And to go back to our word of Micah, the griffon has no feathers on head or neck, only down; and a ruff of whitish down at the lower edge of the baldness."

"People would not like such preaching," said Dan.

"No. They rarely do. So the two grand old prophets had the bitter heart-grief of carrying their message of warning and knowing that the people would not be warned. And they loved their people. Nobody knows what that pain is."

"Well, things became bad enough openly as soon as Ahaz

came to the crown," said I. "There is a long account in Kings and another in Chronicles."

"Let us take them together. The first four verses in both accounts cover the same ground. Ahaz went into open idolatry, like the house of Ahab in the north; with special devotion to the Phœnician worship of Baal."

"Why is it Baal*im* here?"

"Plural. Not that there were strictly a plurality of Baals, but rather different aspects or relations under which the god was worshipped. So there was Baal-peor, Baal-berith, Baal-zebub. The word itself means Lord, or Master, or Owner; and so you see answers partly to the Greek Jupiter, party to the Sun-god of the Easterns. He is practically the same with the Bel or Belus of Babylon."

"Then Ahaz seems to have set up altars and statues to Baal everywhere; 'in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.'"

"Where the king went the people followed. So now it was in Judah as it never was before. The land was full of heathen altars, and smoke went curling up from idolatrous sacrifices through the branches of every great tree, and marked every hill-top with a grey column of abomination. Ahab was not particular about confining himself to Baal worship, either."

"What was that 'burning incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom'?"

"You know the valley. You remember that just where it joins the valley of Kidron it opens out into a level space, where Solomon's gardens were, watered by the fountain of Siloam?"

"How can we remember, Uncle Sam? we have not been there."

"Then we'll go there to-morrow. Well, you know that on the southern height of the Mount of Olives, down here to the left of us, Solomon erected a sanctuary for this Moloch or Milcom, the god of the Ammonites. He was not essentially different from Chemosh the god of the Moabites; to whom, you recollect, the king of Moab offered his son,

when hard pressed by the Jewish besiegers under Jehoshaphat. The altars and temples built by Solomon on the ridge there had long been taken away. Now, down in the valley below, in that open spot, another sanctuary was reared to Molech; and Ahab burnt his own child in the fire in worship of him. It is said that the image of this god was a great brazen figure with outstretched hands, upon which the child victim was laid; and either held upon the hands, or falling from them, it was burnt in the fire which had been kindled underneath. And an old Jewish authority says that because of the drums, *tophim*, which were beat to drown the voice of the child's crying, the place came to be called *Tophet*."

"But in Kings it only says Ahab made his son to pass through the fire?"

"Jewish authority says that 'to cause to pass through' means the same as to burn. And see other passages, Liph. Ps. cvi. 37, 38—Ezek. xvi. 20, 21."

"It seems impossible," said Prissy, "that the people could have changed so suddenly."

"It is impossible. They had not changed suddenly. People never do, without preparation. So as early as the beginning of Jotham's reign the Lord had seen the nation incurable and unpardonable, and Isaiah's commission had gone forth—the commission of hardening."

"But, Uncle Sam, the prophets did not stop prophesying. Isaiah, and Micah you said, and Jeremiah,—they did not cease talking to the people?"

"No, but it was in vain, and Isaiah knew it was in vain. So ministers of the Gospel must tell the good news; but there are always some hearers to whom it is not life but death. Now stop talking, children. To-morrow we will go down into the valley of Hinnom, and then we shall be ready for the story of the war."

CHAPTER XIV.

AHAZ AND TIGLATH-PILESER.

We carried out our plan next day. I on my donkey, of course, the others on foot, we went down into the Kidron valley, and turning into the valley of Hinnom followed it quite up to the upper pool of Gihon; then came back. From the bend of the valley round the south-west angle of the Jerusalem wall, it properly bears the name of Ben-hinnom; and we were astonished to see what a vast burial-place it is. Gloomy, we thought it. The south side of the valley rises in irregular limestone cliffs; and in them, all along, are the little doorways of burial caves; with an olive tree here and there growing where it can. The sides of the valley become higher as you go eastward; and though there is cultivation in the valley bottom and olive-trees, where the ground will do, the whole place seemed to us sad and dark. Full of tombs! At home in America the graveyard is a small place always compared with the city or the village; but here there are more houses for the dead outside the walls, than there are for the living within them.

We passed the hill of Zion; that is cultivated in terraces; and then the ridge of Ophel, south of the Temple area; and I asked why there were no graves on that side of the valley? Uncle Sam said, because they were both enclosed anciently within the wall of the city; and Jerusalem could not be defiled with a grave, only excepting the tombs of her kings on Mount Zion. "Don't you remember," he said, "that Jotham built a great deal on Ophel?"

"Are these tombs all very old?" Dan asked.

"More or less; they are all back of modern times, however."

"Then where do the people of nowadays make their tombs?"

"The Mohammedans bury on the ground just east of the wall of the Haram; that is their principal place. They have also one or two others, on the north and west of the city. The Jews' burying-place you have seen; on the slope of the Mount of Olives above the old tombs in the Kidron valley. In the valley of Jehoshaphat and this valley the tombs are old, and very old, dating far back."

We went into one, but that was enough for me. Little rock rooms, with niches cut in the sides for bodies to be laid there. We went on slowly down the valley, till we came to the place where it opens out a little and joins the Kidron valley; and the place is watered by the fountain of Siloam at the foot of Ophel. Just opposite the pool of Siloam, half way up the slope on the other side, there stands a long building of heavy masonry.

"There," said Uncle Sam, "was—and is, I suppose,—the Potter's field, which the Jewish authorities bought with the thirty pieces of silver. There is a stratum of white clay still there and still used by potters, and the place has been a strangers' burying field from the time of that purchase till now. Or rather, till the beginning of this century."

"And what is that long building?"

"The old charnel-house. It is built in front of a cave, and dug down on the inside, so as to form a kind of pit; but there is nothing to be seen now more than a few bits of bones. The dry soil was believed to have the property of causing the quick decay of bodies buried in it."

Liph had busied himself in counting the tombs on that rock face; and he presently announced that he could number eight hundred just round about that spot. The whole valley there was thick with them, and we know, so was the Kidron valley all along its course. We went on a little farther, to the well of Job as it is called, or En-rogel, just at the junction of the two valleys. There is a grove of olive-trees, and some signs of cultivation and fruitfulness; it is one of the prettiest places about Jerusalem; and we

spread carpets and took out our Bibles, after we had eaten our eggs and oranges; for we wanted to study things on the spot. And here we were, at the place of the "king's gardens;" the Kidron valley coming down from the north, Hinnom meeting it from the west; the ridge of Ophel, looking high and steep from here, with the wall of the Haram crowning the height; and on the other hand the poor little hamlet of Siloam clinging to the sides of the ridge of the Mount of Olives. We sat silent awhile, looking; the whole had a sad, desolate aspect, in spite of the olive-trees.

"Flowers cheer it up in spring," said Uncle Sam, "for a minute. Now it bears witness to what has been. There, children, where the two valleys come together, was Tophet. You must fancy the ground all cultivated and rich, and with a very different look. And there, just in that open place below Ophel, the sanctuary and image of Molech; a brazen figure with the head of an ox, it was. Here were assembled crowds to do honour to Moloch; women brought their little children to be burned in his fire, to propitiate the god; the smoke curled up above the Temple mount, and the shouts and drum-beatings and perhaps rude music of the worshippers made the air full of cruel clangour. This again and again. The worship of Baal seems to have been blended with the worship of Moloch. On the roofs of houses in the city there were altars to Baal erected, and smoke went up from them in separate wreaths into the blue sky, offending the eyes of the Lord."

"Where does it say that?"

"See Jer. xxxii. 29. And Jeremiah prophesied that this valley should be a burial-place and full of graves; and look at it now! The king's gardens, places of Solomon's delight, had been just here; no doubt, lovely as art and nature together could make them."

"Why is this well called the well of Job?"

"Probably a corruption from the well of *Joab*, though that is uncertain. It was here that Adonijah made his feast, at the time when he was conspiring against David and Solomon; and Joab was with him; but I do not see why

Joab should give name to the place, for all that. Let us go on with Ahaz. The next thing we are told about his affairs is the Syro-Ephraimitish war. Read verses 5 and 6 in Kings, and verses 5 and 6 in Chronicles."

"I do not see how they hold together. He was 'delivered into the hand of the king of Syria,' and yet they 'could not overcome him.' How could both be true?"

"We will see. Turn now to the seventh of Isaiah. There we learn that the purpose of the allied kings was to break the strength of Judah, no doubt by taking or destroying her fortresses; to capture Jerusalem, dethrone Ahaz, and put 'the son of Tabeal' in his place. Further, we know that the two confederates began to annoy Judah or to plot against it, before Ahaz came to the crown. It is only a little difficult to arrange their different expeditions in order. They were not able to take Jerusalem; that is one general fact which verse 5 of Kings states to begin with; then the story goes on with details.

"Rezin went to Elath. He had a clear way thither, through the country on the east of the Jordan which belonged to the two tribes and a half. Elath was taken out of the hands of the Jews and a colony of Syrians placed in it, which long held the place. That inlet of power and wealth was cut off from Ahaz. While Rezin was doing this, we may suppose that Pekah advanced into Judah, and the fearful battle was fought which is told of in verse 6 of the Chronicle; the king of Syria meanwhile busily slaying and taking captive on the other side Jordan. The two occasions were plainly separate."

"Do you believe the Israelites killed so many in one day?"

"Yes, I do. See Oded's expressions in verse 9. The hatred between the two parts of the country was aggravated by the religious stand of Judah, and lately by the scornful sending back of the Ephraimite soldiers whom Amaziah had hired; that hatred and the cruelty with which the Israelites always fought, are sufficient to account for the work done. And you must remember that large numbers were engaged on both

sides. Ahaz must have gathered all the force he could muster Then, perhaps, after that battle, though we cannot arrange things with certainty, the intelligence came that Rezin, having subdued and taken Elath and restored to the Edomites their liberty, was now advancing to join his forces to those of King Pekah. Read Isa. vii. 2."

"That is clear enough," said Dan.

"And then came a message for Ahaz; a message of grace and hope. Are you rested? Let us go round to the Pool of Gihon again."

We set forward and retraced our steps through the valley of Hinnom and round into the shallower part of the same valley to the west of the city walls; until we came to the pool. It is a great oblong piece of heavy masonry, more than three hundred feet one way, and two-thirds as broad; eighteen feet deep. It was perfectly dry. It lies in a wide shallow basin of the valley.

"It was full, no doubt, in those days," Uncle Sam said, "and the water was conducted within the walls by a conduit. The bleaching ground of the fullers, where they cleansed and whitened their woollen cloths, lay hereabouts on these slopes; at least, so it is believed; and the highway to Jaffa then as now ran past the pool and the bleaching ground. Ahaz and some of his officers were out here, consulting or planning with reference to the better protection of Jerusalem in case of a siege, which they feared; when Isaiah and his son appeared, and came and stood before the king."

"Who was Isaiah's son? and why did *he* come?"

"He came, because he was, by virtue of his name, a living embodiment of his father's prophecy. The two names together said nearly the whole. Isaiah, 'Jehovah's salvation;' and Shear-jashub, 'a remnant shall return.'"

"*That* is not very promising," said Priscilla.

"It was the burden of Isaiah's commission. Read now the message he delivered to Ahaz; Isa. vii. 4–9."

"What are 'tails of firebrands'?"

"The 'ends of pokers'—sticks used to stir the fire with, Delitzsch says; which will do nothing any more but smoke.

Their power to do mischief was over. If Ahaz would only believe it."

"What if he did not believe it?"

"It remained true, but he would not have the comfort of it, and would take measures in consequence disastrous for him and for his country."

"How was Ephraim broken so?"

"See the record in 2 Kings xvii. 24, when the second importation of strangers was brought into the land. This falling in the twenty-third year of Manasseh would be exactly sixty-five years from the date of the message; and that fits, for Esar-haddon was also the king by whom Manasseh was carried to Babylon two or three years later. Syria was conquered by Tiglath-pileser, and much of Israel's territory also overrun and many of the inhabitants carried away at the same time. But it did Ahaz little good. 'If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.'"

"How far had the two kings got in their invasion of Judah, when Isaiah met Ahaz with this message?"

"Ahaz knew that they were confederate. Probably the devastation wrought by the army of Ephraim had already come to pass; fortresses broken, men killed, captives carried away; so that hearing now that Rezin was coming to help his ally, and that a siege of Jerusalem was in prospect, the hearts of men failed them."

"Why would not Ahaz ask for a sign, do you suppose, Uncle Sam?"

"He did not believe in Jehovah, my dear, nor wish to be subject to Him. His reliance was going out towards the king of Assyria. So he put a religious gloss on his refusal, and 'would not tempt the Lord.' And so, as Delitzsch says, he fastened upon himself and the nation all the evils that were threatened. 'After a few years the forces of Asshur would stand upon the same fuller's field and demand the surrender of Jerusalem. In that very hour, in which Isaiah was standing before Ahaz, the fate of Jerusalem was decided for more than two thousand years.'"

"But what was the sign? I do not understand."

"The sign is the wonderful birth of Immanuel, our Deliverer. Yet that was not to happen in the time of Ahaz. What *was* true of that time was, that before a child yet unborn, but soon to be born, should arrive at understanding of good and evil,— so soon as that,—'the land will be desolate, of whose two kings thou art afraid.' So Delitzsch translates. And so, less than a year after, a boy was born to Isaiah, whose name reads, 'Speed, spoil; Booty hastens,' and the child was not three years old when the king of Assyria swept down upon Syria and Ephraim. The prophet, as so constantly happened, spoke of two or three things at once, typically more or less connected; the words which presently were to be realised mingling with others which were felt and understood to reach far on into time and mount up to a meaning beyond earthly limits."

"I do not see what butter and honey have to do with a child's intelligence," Dan remarked.

"Take the words as otherwise rendered—'Butter and honey will he eat, at the time that he knows to refuse the evil and choose the good.' That is: at the time he should arrive at such maturity, the land would be so desolate and waste, that no food would be left but such as was procurable from the herds grazing at large and the bees building in the clefts of the rocks. Read the rest of the chapter, children."

"Ahaz was infatuated!" said Dan.

"Unbelievers always are. Don't you know, God calls them constantly 'fools'? And notice, the unbelieving king is expressly warned here that the 'rasor' with which the Lord would 'shave' the land, would be the king of Assyria; yet to that power Ahaz immediately resorts for help."

"Uncle Sam, how do you know that this about Immanuel means anything so far away as Christ's coming?"

"Read Isa. ix. 6, 7; and then xi. 1–10."

"Yes," said Dan; "that is plain; but I get confused about things."

"No wonder. But it was the way of prophecy, from the very beginning, to clothe its more distant and ultimate

meaning under a material and comparatively immediate form. Both are true, the literal and the spiritual declarations; but under the terms of the former will be found words that can be satisfied only through the fulfilment of the latter. We must go back for the present to Ahaz. Read Chronicles verses 16–19. The Edomites, freed from Judah by Rezin, fell upon the south of the country, taking booty and making captives. The Philistines used their opportunity, recovered what Uzziah had possessed in the plain, and invaded the hill country; making permanent conquests, and establishing themselves in the pleasant region which we visited a few days ago. The condition of Judah now you may read in Isaiah's description, ch. i. 5–8. Ahaz feared the taking of Jerusalem itself by the powerful allied forces; so he sent to the king of Assyria."

"And bought his help with treasures out of the house of the Lord," said I.

"Out of his own house too, and made the princes pay," said Liph.

"What did he mean by 'I am thy servant and thy son,' Kings verse 7?"

"He put himself under Tiglath-pileser's authority as well as under his protection; declared himself subject to him; preferring the help and the rule of the world-power to that which Isaiah had offered. Like many a one nowadays."

"It says in Chronicles, that Tiglath-pileser 'distressed him but strengthened him not.' And yet he *did* help him. See Kings, verse 9."

"And read 2 Kings xv. 29. The king of Assyria swept down upon Galilee and carried off the people captive out of the land. Of course we are to understand that when Rezin and Pekah, coming against Jerusalem or sitting down before it, heard of the advance of the king of Assyria, they left Judah to attend to their own affairs at home; and both were overcome and both met with speedy death. Yet Ahaz was not helped."

"Why not, sir? that looks like help."

"Ay," said my uncle, "world-power often *looks like* help;

but it is a false show. 'Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom is no help,' Psalm cxlvi. 3. It is evident, comparing the notices together, that Tiglath-pileser not only conquered Syria and Galilee for himself, but made demands upon Ahaz which reduced him also to the condition of a conquered prince and tributary. This is not stated distinctly here; but look on to 2 Kings xviii. 7, 14, 20. You see that Hezekiah had come to the crown not as an independent ruler but as a vassal of the king of Assyria. When Ahaz went to Damascus, 2 Kings xvi. 10, it may have been to render formal submission, or it may have been to hinder the king of Assyria from coming to Jerusalem; or it might be both under one. And when he came back, you see that he was oppressed by the fear of this great power which he had invoked to his own hurt. See Kings, verse 18.

"'*For* the king of Assyria'—that is, to give them to him?"

"Not so; the words in the Hebrew mean 'for fear of the king of Assyria.' If we knew what these objects mentioned were, we could better understand the statement."

"'And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord.'"

"Yes; tried to appease the gods of Syria. Pushed the brazen altar of sacrifice from its place in the court of the Temple, and had his new altar, copied from the one at Damascus, put in its place; ordered *that* to be used for the daily sacrifices; saying that as to the old altar he would consider what should be done with it. That is the sense of the latter sentence of verse 15; it runs differently in our version."

"What harm, Uncle Sam? This new altar was for the service of the Lord."

"I remarked before, I believe, Liph, that you cannot serve the Lord by disobeying Him. The altar, as well as all the rest of the Temple furniture, was ordered by the Lord Himself; the new one built after a heathen pattern was a

heathen altar, to all intents and purposes. Then Ahaz went on to deface and partially break up some of the other brazen furniture of the court, the lavers and the great sea; taking away the stands from under the lavers and the brazen oxen from under the brazen sea. What he did this for, we cannot tell; it does not appear; possibly Ahaz wanted them for the adornment of something elsewhere."

"Maybe he sent them to Tiglath-pileser."

"It is not said so. And the Sabbath-stand mentioned in the next verse, probably a finely wrought canopy or covered place in the Temple court made for the use of the king when worshipping there; also the 'king's entrance,' of which we know nothing; Ahaz took them away 'for fear of the king of Assyria.' Either fearing that they would fall a sacrifice to that king's rapacity, or on the other hand, that they would seem to identify him with the worship of Jehovah more than was politic. And that worship Ahaz went on now to give up entirely. See the account in Chronicles. He shut up the doors of the Temple; from that time there was no more burning of incense before the Lord, nor setting of the shew-bread, nor lighting of the lamps of the candlestick. Instead, altars rose to all sorts of gods at every street corner of Jerusalem. All through Judah the same thing went on."

"But the sacrifices on the brazen altar, at least on the new altar Ahaz had made, they were not stopped, Uncle Sam?"

"They were not offered to God, Prissy. See what Hezekiah said, 2 Chron. xxix. 7."

"And Ahaz was not buried with the kings," said Liph. "Why?"

"Because he had not walked in the ways of David and the larger number of David's successors."

"Well, who ordered that, do you suppose?"

"It may have been some prophet or priest, or Hezekiah himself. So, children, you comprehend what sort of an inheritance Hezekiah came into. A land totally depraved;

the Temple closed and its service ceased; altars and sacrifices to false gods at every street turning and on every hill; a tremendous political power holding the nation in its grasp, already subject; and the neighbour kingdom giving a warning image of the further destruction which was threatened and impending. See 2 Kings xvii. 18, 20."

CHAPTER XV.

HEZEKIAH AND SENNACHERIB.

"I AM very sorry for Hezekiah," I said as we began our next evening's talk.

"With reason. Yet Hezekiah had one thing which carried him through all his troubles."

"What was that?"

"Faith, child. Hezekiah's faith and Isaiah's faith staved off the evil day. Nothing could hinder it permanently now; but though the clouds gathered loweringly and held the storm which would break by and by, the storm never burst in the days of Hezekiah. In old time as in the new the Lord's people were ever the salt of the earth."

"Didn't the people turn too, when they had a good king to lead them?"

"No, Prissy. Outwardly no doubt, and to a certain formal extent, they obeyed and followed the king. But the heart of the people was perverted, according to the words of Isaiah. You will see that just as soon as a bad ruler gave them liberty and example, they swung back again immediately into all their bad ways. There was faith in Hezekiah, as it is said, beyond all that were before him or after him; in the people none."

"How did Hezekiah show such wonderful faith?"

"Let us go on and see. He had two tasks upon his hands, or two burdens; a people sunk in defilement, and a nation degraded to vassalage under the king of Assyria. The Lord's people ought not to be in either case; and Hezekiah resolved they should not. Looking at the facts, do you think it did not require extraordinary faith to carry this resolve into effect? Hezekiah began with the first thing, and made no delay"

"What is the 'first month'? The first month he began to reign?"

"Not necessarily. The first month is Nisan, the beginning of the ecclesiastical and calendar year. Hezekiah may have come to the crown possibly a few days or weeks earlier. Now, children, imagine the scene described in Chron., verse 4. The 'east street'—more literally 'the open space of the east'—is held to be an open piece of ground to the eastward of the Temple. Thither the king summoned the whole body of priests and Levites, and made an address to them. Everything was wrong, and the first thing to do was to cleanse the Temple and restore the worship of God. Nothing could succeed or thrive till that was done. And the Levites and priests seem to have taken hold of the work with a will."

"First they 'sanctified themselves.' What does that mean?"

"Cleared and purified themselves from all ceremonial uncleanness, which you know would unfit them for coming into the Temple at all."

"But the Temple itself was defiled."

"Yes," said Uncle Sam smiling. "Children, he who would take hold of the work of the Lord anywhere, must himself be holy. That is the first and inevitable requisite. How should they make anything clean, who are not clean themselves?"

"What was not clean in the Temple? I know, the idolatrous altar and all that; but what had the priests and Levites to *do*?"

"Read the account in Chronicles, verses 12–19. They were eight days cleansing the courts; and it took eight more for the house itself. You know that during the reign of Ahaz and the prevalence of idolatrous worship, many things no doubt were brought into the Temple which had been used or concerned in such worship; all such things were unclean and defiling. Besides which, in the natural and ordinary course of the legal worship there was always an accumulation of ashes, blood, dust, and so forth, which it was the duty of the priests, and Levites, constantly to cleanse

away. Now for a good while all this care had been neglected and intermitted."

"Did they carry all the rubbish out here into the valley below us?"

"Into the 'fields of Kidron;' that could not be just here; but more likely up at the northern end of the valley where it spreads out into an open space, and olive-trees and cultivation are to be found now. The priests 'went into the house;' the Levites might not; they did the work of the courts."

"It took sixteen days before all was done. Don't you suppose Hezekiah was taking away some of the idols and altars in the streets meanwhile?"

"It was in his heart, for obedience comes ever before sacrifice. In Kings xviii. 4, we read that Hezekiah made thorough work with all the abominations which had filled the city and the land. However, the work was more than could be done in a day. Jerusalem was cleared before the great passover; see Chronicles xxx. 13, 14; therefore we are bound to conclude that it could not be done sooner. With so much on his hands, the king had to go step by step. 'Then Hezekiah the king rose early.'"

"There was a great congregation assembled. That we learn from verses 32, 33. Hezekiah was accompanied by the princes and nobles and elders of the city, who specially surrounded him, and with him went up into the courts of the Temple. It was a great day. For the king would make good the covenant again between the people and the Lord, which Ahaz his father and the people had broken. And the first thing was to offer a sin-offering of atonement, to put the Lord and the people *at one* again."

"Sir, the burnt-offerings are mentioned first."

"No, they are rather mentioned together. But in the service, the sin-offering was always first offered. Do you not see why? 'Without shedding of blood is no remission.' And until sin is remitted, no offering from the sinner can be pleasant or accepted before God. Therefore, first the blood of the sin-offering, to make peace; then the

whole of the burnt-offering, to signify surrender of heart and life and obedience; *then* the shared peace-offering, which was part burned on God's altar and part eaten at the table of the offerer, to signify peace and joy and communion with God."

"But, sir, do you not think that God would forgive anybody that repented?"

"Through the blood of Christ."

"But if he *repented*, sir? wouldn't he be forgiven anyhow?"

"If he repented truly, he would do what God tells him to do; and that is, to trust in Christ."

"But there's the Prodigal Son, sir."

"He came to his father. And Christ says that no man *can* come to the Father, but by Him. He is the Way. 'He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life;' no matter what other thing he has."

"Why did they want so many sorts of animals for the sacrifice, Uncle Sam?"

"Turn back to Lev. iv. where the law of the sin-offering is given. There you see that for the sin of a priest the sacrifice must be a bullock, verse 3; for the sin of the whole congregation the same, verse 13; for a ruler it was to be a he-goat, verse 22; for a private person a female of the goats or of the sheep; verses 27, 32. The burnt-offering might be a bullock, or a ram, or a he-goat, or turtle doves, or pigeons. Lev. i. And in the Bible the number seven stands for the number of perfection. So when Hezekiah brought seven bullocks, seven rams, seven he-goats and seven lambs, he brought for king and congregation and priest and private; and brought a full offering. And see, children; it was after the sin-offering had been slain, and the blood sprinkled in the Holy Place before the Lord, and so formal reconciliation was made for the people; *then*, when the burnt-offering of consecration was laid on the altar, whole, as it was always, for God does not accept half consecration; *then* began the peal of praise and joy from the musicians the Levites; then

came the ring of the instruments and the blast of the silver trumpets and the swell of human voices in the great choir. And when the burnt sacrifice was finished, then and not before, the way was open for the people individually to bring thank-offerings and peace-offerings. Before that they might not, could not, dared not."

"Then, Uncle Sam," said I, "will God not take anything from those who do not give Him all?"

"Tiny, He says so."

"Where, sir?" said Liph.

"In various places. See for example Matt. x. 37—Luke xiv. 26. And Prov. xv. 8, and xxviii. 9. And read in Isaiah i. how the Lord speaks of service that is brought with unclean hands."

"There are some other things," I went on. "What is the laying on of hands, verse 23?"

"As much as to say, 'I put this creature, symbolically, in my place.' Or, 'I put upon the head of this creature my sins and responsibilities;' or, in the case of the burnt-offering, 'I make it the sign of my surrender and devotion; it stands for me.'"

"Very curious," said Dan.

"Very significant," said my uncle. "We are bound to be sacrifices, children, just as well; only now Christ has died, and the law is satisfied, and our sacrifice is a living one. Bless the Lord! See Rom. xii. 1. What next, Tiny?"

"The music. That must have been grand! How were the instruments David's?"

"Turn to 1 Chron. xxiii. 5, xvi. 4–6, xxv. 1, Ps. cl. 3–5, and for the trumpets, Num. x. 10. And when the burnt-offering was all laid on the altar, then king and princes and congregation fell down on their faces on the Temple floor and worshipped. Then Hezekiah bade the people bring their gifts, all who would. All who desired to express their devotion to God, or who in the gladness of reconciliation and forgiveness wished to offer a thank-offering, might come forward with their gifts. The sin-offering had been offered; the way was open."

"They brought quantities. It must have taken a long time to kill and burn all those beasts."

"More than one day. The peace-offerings too were in part cooked and eaten by the worshippers; you must give time for all that feasting."

"The priests were too few; how is that?"

"The priesthood had largely followed the court practice and were defiled with idolatry; so that only a small number had obeyed the call and purified themselves from all sorts of ceremonial uncleanness. The Levites of Jerusalem had been more faithful, it appears. There was a great deal of work connected with these offerings, you must remember. In the case of burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, after the worshipper had drawn his knife across the throat of the animal, the priests caught the blood in basins and sprinkled it upon the great altar; then after the animal was flayed and cut up the priests arranged the pieces upon the altar to burn; and from every peace-offering the inner fat with the kidneys must be taken away and burnt. All these operations take time; and on great occasions, when the offerings were for the congregation and not private offerings, the flaying was the business of the priest, so this time the priests were too few to do all the work, and the Levites were allowed to help in skinning the animals."

"What were the 'drink-offerings'?"

"With the sacrifices, burnt and peace offerings, there must always be a meat-offering of flour mingled with oil, which signified the man's assent to the fact that his property, like himself, was the Lord's. Then the wine, about three pints, poured out last of all, testified to his joy and gladness in the whole transaction, sin forgiven, communion renewed between God and his soul, and himself a living sacrifice to the Lord with all that he had. The wine gave as it were a gleeful 'Amen!' to the whole. So it is called, Judges ix. 13, something 'that cheereth God and man.'"

"I *never* could understand that before!" said Dan.

"And then, Uncle Sam, the next thing Hezekiah did was to hold his great passover."

"I believe so, Tiny. Great authorities have tried to make it out that this could not have happened till six years later; but I think it was as the Chronicle puts it. After Shalmaneser had finished his work in Samaria, in Hezekiah's sixth year, there were not people enough left in the land to send a 'multitude' to the passover. Moreover, it is not supposable that Hezekiah should have delayed his reforms so long; and at the time of the passover the altars were yet standing at the street corners in Jerusalem. No, it must have been now. 'The king had taken counsel'—that is, before the 14th of Nisan, while the work of cleansing the Temple was going on; he had taken counsel with his chief nobles and arranged the matter. They could not hold the feast at the legal time, because the priesthood was not yet sufficiently cleared of its share in the idolatrous worship which had filled court and country, and purified from its uncleanness, and there was not time either to collect the people. So he took advantage of a clause in the law which in certain circumstances allowed the second month to be substituted for the first. In case of necessary absence from Jerusalem, or unavoidable uncleanness, this might be done; and both causes were in effect now. So the king's posts went through the land, from south to north, carrying the invitation."

"And they laughed them to scorn!"

"That was their way. Read 2 Kings xvii. 6–23, if you want to know the state of things at this time in Israel. The end was very near now. Hosea and Amos had prophesied in vain; it was quite in order that the people should laugh at Hezekiah's invitation."

"Still a great many came."

"From the northern hills and the distant plain, from Galilee and Samaria, many a one came, not properly purified according to law, but yet seeking his fathers' God in his heart. Hezekiah prayed that they might be accepted, and the Lord heard him and 'healed the people;' made them whole in what they were lacking; made them well of their sin-sickness. See Hosea xiv. 4; Jer. iii. 22."

"Oh, that's beautiful, Uncle Sam! And first of all, Hezekiah had the false altars taken away."

"Ay. Obedience comes before sacrifice. The statue of Moloch was removed from the valley of Hinnom; the altars broken down at the street corners; and the rubbish cast out here into the Kidron valley; not *brook*. Water sometimes is seen there, and sometimes used to flow there; but it is a dry water-bed for the most part."

"That must have been a pretty time!" said I.

"Morally. For seven days, there was sacrificing and feasting, the feasts of restored communion and peace with God, and the Levites instructing the people in the land. There was great joy in the vast congregation, so much that they doubled the time of the festival. There had been no passover of all Israel since the days of Solomon. And at the end the grand blessing was spoken over the people; see Num. vi. 24–26. 'And their prayer came up to His holy dwelling-place.'"

"Yet it didn't save them, sir."

"They were saved for all Hezekiah's reign. They would have been saved for ever, Liph, if they would have remained faithful."

"Well, they were in earnest now," said Priscilla; "for they went through the land breaking down the idols and high places. Even in the north, Uncle Sam."

"It was too late for the north; and indeed it was only a few of that people who had come; the majority mocked at the whole thing. However in Judah the reform was for the moment earnest and hearty. This appears by the tithes. When a man's conscience reaches his purse-strings, you may know that it is stirring. Here the question was not of money, but of the equivalent. See Num. xviii. 21–24. Hezekiah established the service of the house of the Lord on its old footing; the sacrifices, the incense, the bands of choral music daily officiating, and all the rest; gave from his own property the sacrifices for the daily and weekly and monthly rites; and then, that the priests and Levites might attend to their sacred business without care or distraction, he summoned the people of Judah to bring in the tithes for

them. And the summons was obeyed. Places were appointed where the gifts brought in might be laid; and heaps began to grow. In the third month they began; that was just after the end of corn harvest; and all along through the season the tithes poured in, tithes of everything; honey as well as wheat, and all manner of fruits, and tithes of cattle. So it went on till grapes and fruits were all gathered in the seventh month; and there was great store of all things, so that the king's heart was greatly encouraged; and he was astonished also; but the chief priest told him that since the people began to bring in the tithes there had been not only plenty for daily use, but all these heaps left over."

"Then Hezekiah had storerooms built to hold them."

"Or arranged to receive them; it may mean either. And officers were appointed to be over these stores and to give them out."

"Then what is verse 14?"

"Korah was put over the voluntary offerings; tithes were by law; and he and those under him were to distribute of these offerings the parts which being holy to the Lord belonged to the priests; the 'heave-offerings' and the like. See Lev. vii. 14, 29–35. But it seems that he and the officers under him had the general charge of distribution from all the store of tithes and things brought in, to all the Levites and priests in the country, in the several cities where they lived."

"But I don't understand these verses, 16 and 17, and so on."

"No. Naturally. You know the Levites and priests, were all arranged in 'courses,' according to their houses and families, of which one course served at a time. They were all registered and catalogued. And the meaning of these verses is, that these officers under Korah distributed their portions to the courses who were not on duty, '*besides* the catalogue of males from three years old and upward,' who were in attendance in the Temple and eat the holy things which might not be eaten anywhere else. All the others at home in the cities, wives, children and all, verse 18,

were faithfully served with their portions by the men appointed for the duty. So the whole machinery of religious service was once more regulated and in order."

"And Hezekiah was a thoroughly good king," said Priscilla; "what he did 'he did with all his heart.'"

"And 'prospered whithersoever he went forth;' 2 Kings xviii. 7. But there is another question of interest, children, connected with him. How came he to be such a good king?"

"Why, nothing is said about it," I cried.

"Not here, in Kings or Chronicles. Nevertheless, in another place, Hezekiah's repentance seems to be referred to the preaching of the prophet Micah. Micah was a man of Judah, who lived in that pretty valley we visited a few days ago; at Marosheth. He had been prophesying through the reign of Ahaz and part of the reign of Jotham; like Isaiah, who began his work a little sooner, he reproved the people for their pride, violence, luxury, idolatry, oppression, and injustice; and like Isaiah he seems to have cried in vain. Then, towards the end of his thirty years or more, perhaps, of ministry, he proclaimed in the hearing of Hezekiah and a great assembly of the people the threat which he was charged to deliver;—'Zion shall be ploughed as a field;'—'Evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem.' Read the third chapter of Micah, Dan."

"What prophets does he speak of, in the fifth verse?"

"False prophets, who were beginning openly to withstand the word of the Lord by His messengers. This evil was added now to the others in Judah. Open rebellion against the prophets and gainsaying of their words. However, for this time, Hezekiah and the people repented, and reformed, and the evil threatened and coming was pushed far away."

"But Sennacherib came up against him, sir."

"And went back again, discomfited."

"Not at first, sir. Not altogether."

"Not altogether. No. A good king cannot utterly save a bad people. He may, and Hezekiah did, stave off the evil day. Nevertheless, the people must have the lesson. So

the Assyrian came. But first, apparently, Hezekiah subdued the Philistines, who rebelled, you recollect, under his father; Hezekiah brought them back to obedience, and then was bold to throw off the yoke of Assyria."

"Was he right, sir, to do that?"

"Certainly he was right. The people that have God for their king have no business to be subject to any other power."

"Then why did he say afterwards that he was wrong? Look at the fourteenth verse, in Kings, 18th chapter.

"He was wrong *then*. It was an admission made to appease his conqueror, made in a moment of extreme terror and trouble, when his faith failed."

"Sennacherib had been pretty patient, to wait so many years."

"Sennacherib was not king all those years, but his father Sargon. And it is not likely that Hezekiah threw off the Assyrian yoke, either while their armies were a few miles off in Samaria, or while Sargon was making victorious campaigns against Egypt and Philistia, passing and repassing in the plain. We must make another remark. Hezekiah's illness, told of in 2 Kings xx., must have occurred long before Sennacherib's invasion, though related after it. He reigned but twenty-nine years in all; and fifteen of them were after that illness; so you see Sennacherib's first coming could not have been in his fourteenth year. It is supposed that the account in chap. xx. originally came in here, at the thirteenth verse of 2 Kings xviii., which read 'the king of Assyria' simply; and that some subsequent scribe, confusing Sargon with his son and ignorant of *two* invasions by Sennacherib, thought the story of Hezekiah's illness broke the course of the narration, and so put it at the end."

"Uncle Sam," I said, rather plaintively I believe, "I do not know much about the Assyrians."

"Oh, don't you!" cried Liph. "You know enough of them. They were a fierce strong people."

"I know *that*," said I, "but it is not quite enough."

"How much do you know, Liph?"

"Their kingdom was on the Tigris, sir, in Northern Mesopotamia, and the capital was Nineveh."

"What was the origin of the kingdom?"

Nobody answered.

"See Gen. x. 11. They were a people who came from Chaldæa, some time before the sixteenth century B.C. and established themselves in the north. Somewhere about 1250 B.C. the northern kingdom obtained ascendency over Babylon, but this was never thoroughly done till Sennacherib's time. The two monarchies flourished side by side, Assyria, however, being the superior. And it was a great kingdom, and grew to be the greatest in the world. You should read Layard's Nineveh to get some notion of the magnificence of her kings, and the splendour of her courts, and the beauty of her works of art. The remains even yet let us know a great deal about it. The palaces built by Sargon and by Sennacherib were stately exceedingly, and they were adorned with sculptures that are still extremely imposing, and superb."

"Tell, Uncle Sam, I want to have a notion of Sennacherib. He is only a name to me."

"You must go back of Sennacherib. About the time when Jehoshaphat was reigning in Judah, there was a king of Assyria, who has left magnificent works behind him. He was a conqueror and a builder, and Assyria was growing great under him. At Calah was one of his palaces. It was a great collection of noble halls and smaller chambers built about a great central court which was one hundred and thirty feet one way by near one hundred feet the other way. There were grand gateways of entrance, guarded by huge winged lions with human heads: and passing through one of these, people came into a great audience hall, one hundred and fifty feet long. At one end is still to be seen a raised platform of stone, with steps, on which the king's throne no doubt stood; and the room was lined with slabs covered with sculptures, containing the history and doings of the monarch. From this hall you went into another, smaller, by a most magnificent doorway, between great human-headed

winged bulls in yellow limestone; nothing more majestic can be imagined. The second hall was full of sculptures too, of another sort. Then you came into the great open court. On other sides of this court were other great halls; all of them ornamented in the noblest style. Sculptures first, for nine or ten feet from the ground; above them, enamelled bricks or fresco painting for seven or eight feet more. The sculptures are full of spirit and expression; the effect must have been in the highest degree imposing. And the whole pile of the palace was lifted up on an enormous platform of sun-dried bricks, cased with stone."

"And that was back in Jehoshaphat's time."

"It is plain from what these sculptures of Asshur-idanni-pal teach us, that in his reign the Assyrians were a cultivated people, and luxurious in their style of living. Mr. Rawlinson says, in dress and furniture and so forth, they must have been not much inferior to people of later times. And the king's favourite capital, Calah, with its piles of palaces and its stone sphinxes and obelisks, and its abundance of richest ornament, must have been, he says, a scene of bewildering beauty. Then his son, Shalmaneser II., was the king who conquered the Hamathites and Hittites, came over the Euphrates with one hundred thousand men, overcame Benhadad king of Syria, and after him on another occasion Hazael; and to him Jehu king of Israel paid tribute. The sculptures show him receiving the tribute of five nations, Israel being one of the five. And after that, Assyria went on growing in magnificence and extending her rule on every side of her; till we come to the Shalmaneser, the fourth of the name, who conquered Samaria. He was followed, the year that Samaria fell, by Sargon. Now you have a sketch of the whole."

"And you think, Uncle Sam, that Hezekiah did not throw off the yoke of Assyria as soon as he came to the throne?"

"I am confident he could not. While Shalmaneser was a few miles off, at Samaria, he would not think of it. A little later we read of Sargon making expeditions against Egypt and against Philistia, which, or part of it, was in

some sort of union with Egypt. He had conquered Elam, subdued Chaldæa, overcome the king of Hamath, and at last came down upon Gaza. That was, you know, a very important border city, and could not be passed by if he would advance safely upon Egypt. And shortly after, at Raphia, a place some distance beyond Gaza, the two world powers, Egypt and Assyria, came to their first direct encounter in a pitched field. Egypt was terribly worsted. That was about 721 years B.C. And since that time Egypt has never regained, unless for a short interval, anything like her former position. She went down under every successive power that ruled Western Asia."

"Hezekiah could not have rebelled against Sargon before that time," said Dan.

"It was some eight or nine years later, that Sargon came against Ashdod. He reduced Babylonia to final subjection; humbled wild Arabs of the desert and mountain tribes in his neighbourhood; everywhere transplanting the inhabitants out of their own land into some other. Arabians and Medes and others he brought to Samaria; Israelites were settled in Media, a large part of which country Sargon had annexed to his own dominions. Nehemiah mentions Arabians in Samaria; chap. ii. 19 and iv. 7. But we read nothing of expeditions against Hezekiah, who would certainly not have been allowed to remain in peace if he had broken the Assyrian yoke."

"They were really a great people, were they not?" said Liph.

"In many things. Building, and arts, and manufactures all throve among them in Sargon's time. He built magnificently. They were in many things a great people, but proud and violent and fierce, and luxurious, with true heathen vices, and especially renowned for treachery. Let us see how the Bible speaks of them. Find the book of Nahum, and see chap. ii. 1, 11, 12, and iii. 1."

"'Full of *lies* and robbery'"—said I, reading.

"That was her character. And see Isa. xxxiii. 1, 8, and Zeph. ii. 15, and Isaiah x. 8–14. And for another description, Ezek. xxxi. 1–11."

"Oh, that is beautiful!" said I. "And then, because they were proud, they were punished."

"High looks are always brought down, sooner or later. But the day of punishment, though near, was not yet. Sennacherib was one of the most magnificent and mighty of all the kings of Assyria. It was he who, about the fifth year of his reign, came to chastise Hezekiah into obedience. Now you want to know something about an Assyrian army, and I promised to tell you. Look at Isaiah's description of them first, in chap. v. 27–29."

"If none were weary among them, they must be a strong people," said Dan.

"So the sculptures show them; with very muscular limbs and strong frames. 'Their wheels like a whirlwind.' The chariots were the most powerful arm of ancient warfare. Hardly any troops could stand the rush of an advancing body of chariots at full speed. From the chariots the warriors fought with bows and arrows; that was the principal weapon; though sword and spear were also at hand. Theirs was the service of greatest distinction. Next to the chariots came the horsemen. They fought either with spears or with bows and arrows. The chariot warrior was dressed in a tunic, or sometimes in a shirt of mail with short sleeves; the cavalry soldier somewhat the same, with a laced boot or greave covering the leg; in Sennacherib's time a close coat-of-mail appears also on the horsemen. The horses wore a sort of housing for a saddle, with a collar ornamented with rows of tassels hanging over the breast. Then the main body of the army was of course infantry. They were swordsmen, archers, and spearmen. The light archers wore tunics, no helmet, bare legs and arms; heavy archers wore coats of mail, sandals, and helmets. These latter were protected by shields held in other hands; some of them had none. Then there were foot soldiers with spear and shield. The whole was a regularly organised force, and very terrible to the other nations upon earth. See Nahum's description of them, chap. ii. 3. 4."

"Then they wore red, like the English soldiers."

"So it seems. The chariots were elegant, the horses ornamented with trappings; power and splendour went with them. Nothing could stay the march of an Assyrian army. If they came to forests, they cut their way; if they found rivers, they put the chariots upon floats or boats and swam the horses over. Foot soldiers set themselves astride of skins filled with air and swam over so. Look at Isaiah xxxvii. 24, 25, for the proud boast of victory with which the Assyrian king went to war. Neither water nor the want of water could stop him. Where the desert was dry, his men digged till they found a supply; and 'with the sole of his foot' the king dried up the rivers."

"Were they cruel too, Uncle Sam?"

"Ancient warfare was apt to be cruel. Yes, Tiny; the Assyrian is called 'he that dasheth in pieces.' In a fight they did not usually give quarter; and as a reward was given after the battle for every head of an enemy, of course there was indiscriminate slaughter of all who could not defend themselves. Every soldier wore a short sword at his side. In the very heat of conflict, soldiers would leave their ranks to carry a head of somebody to a secure place; and when the victory was gained, the field of battle became a field of butchery. The whole army turned in to the work, and heads of dead and living were cut off, carried to a receiving place, and account taken of the numbers. There is an inscription of the reign of Asshur-idanni-pal, in which he tells how he treated the people of a city he had taken, 'Their men, young and old, I took prisoners. Of some I cut off the feet and hands; of others I cut off the noses, ears, and lips; of the young men's ears I made a heap; of the old men's heads I built a minaret. I exposed their heads as a trophy in front of their city. The male children and the female children I burnt in the flames. The city I destroyed, and consumed, and burnt with fire."

"I should think people where they came would have been frightened to death."

"We can hardly imagine how terrible those old sieges and storms of towns were. Modern times are bad enough;

those were wilder and crueller still. On the monuments we see the soldiers, after the capture of a place, cutting down the precious fruit-trees, carrying off spoil, bringing before the king some of the inhabitants for sentence. We see him putting his foot on their necks, or giving them over to the executioner. You see in the sculptures here a prisoner upon whose head a heavy club is descending; here one whose captor is about to cut his head off; and sometimes a row of impaled men before the walls of the city. Generally the great mass went into captivity, along with the cattle of the land, and every precious thing that could be carried off. So Isaiah's description would be literally true; chap. i. 7, 8."

CHAPTER XVI.

HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS.

"It is the thirty-second chapter of 2 Chronicles, and the eighteenth of 2 Kings, that we want to-day; isn't it, sir?"

"Let us say first, the twentieth chapter of Kings."

"Why that comes after, Uncle Sam?"

"The events must have come before, Tiny, in all probability. I think that, as has been suggested, some scribe who did not understand the facts of the history changed the number of the year of Sennacherib's invasion and put Hezekiah's illness as a subsequent thing. Let us look at the fixed points of the story. The illness happened in Hezekiah's fourteenth year; for he lived fifteen years after it. It happened before the Assyrian invasion; for see the promise, 2 Kings xx. 6, and also verse 13 of same chapter. After Hezekiah had stripped off everything to pay tribute, he would have had little left to show. Then, according to the Assyrian records, it was now twenty years since Sargon conquered Samaria; and Hezekiah would be in the twenty-seventh of his reign. In whatever year the Assyrian invasion fell, we must take the king's sickness as coming before those troubles; in the fourteenth year of his reign."

We turned to the chapters in Isaiah and Kings which give the story.

"What I do not understand," said Liph, "is how Hezekiah's illness could be mortal and yet he could recover."

"Because God can heal a mortal disease."

"But Isaiah told him he would die."

"So Jonah told the Ninevites, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.' Yet Nineveh stood for some years longer."

"Well, how could it?"

"There is no difficulty here. In each case, and all similar cases, the event is announced which in the present course of things will certainly take place. But alter something in the present course of things, and God will change His action."

"What was altered in the course of things here, to make Him change His action?" Liph asked rather defiantly.

"Hezekiah prayed to Him."

"Do you mean, that God will alter His course of action because somebody asks Him?"

"If the somebody is one of His dear children."

"Can His children have whatever they choose to ask for then?"

"Jesus says so. But stop, Liph; not so fast. I said 'His dear children;' and they wish nothing that God does not will; at any rate, not so that they can ask for it importunately. So that whatever they are able to ask in faith, they may know they will get."

"How can they be sure they are not asking something He does *not* will?"

"His Holy Spirit tells them that. See Matt. xxi. 22, and Mark xi. 24. So Hezekiah prayed, and was heard, and was healed."

"Uncle Sam, Hezekiah says in verse 3, that he has been perfectly good; and he was not perfectly good a little while after, when the ambassadors came?"

"He said he had walked before the Lord with a perfect heart; that is, with a loyal, undivided love and obedience; that was true. It does not touch the fact that he afterwards fell into temptation. It says specially on that occasion that 'God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart;' see 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. The Lord let him fall into temptation, to give him the self-knowledge he needed."

"But, sir, I thought the Bible says that God is not the author of evil?"

"Neither is He," said Uncle Sam sighing. "Only seeing the hidden heart-sickness in His servant, He gave occasion for it to come out, that it might be cured. The like happens often, I reckon."

"What was that sun-dial?"

"One that Ahaz had had constructed, on some eastern model very likely. It may have been something like an obelisk placed at the top of a square succession of steps, so graduated that the shadow of the obelisk, coming down the steps, would indicate the hour or the half hour of the day. The dial was called the 'Steps of Ahaz.'"

"How could the shadow go up, after it had come down?"

"I don't know."

"Do you believe it did?"

"The king of Babylon believed it at the time; for he sent his ambassadors to make inquiries concerning the wonder. Why should I disbelieve it? See 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. It was another answer to prayer, Liph. 'Isaiah cried unto the Lord; and He brought the shadow ten steps backward.' 2 Kings xx. 11."

"I cannot understand it."

"Do not fall into the common error of ruling out of existence all things you cannot understand."

"Uncle Sam, Hezekiah wrote a song upon his recovery, which I cannot quite explain. In the 38th of Isaiah."

"What cannot you explain, Prissy?"

"He says, 'Mine age is departed'—what does he mean?"

"Delitzsch translates it—'My home is broken up'—calling the body the home of the soul. And the next word is still more striking; 'I have cut off like a weaver my life.' You do not understand that. In weaving a piece of cloth, you know there are long threads, called the warp, stretched on the loom, between which the shuttle flies carrying the woof and making the web. As the web grows it is rolled up, until the end of the warp threads is reached; and then the piece is cut from the loom. So Hezekiah speaks of his life as at that time like a finished web, ready to be cut off."

"Oh, I understand! Then what does verse 13 mean?"

"Pain, child; that and verse 14. The sufferer was brought down to inarticulate cries and groans."

"How then would he go all his years in *bitterness?*"

"It is not that. Rather *upon* that bitterness or trouble,

from that time, he would 'go softly all his years;' *i.e.*, quietly, peacefully. And in verse 16, children, the beautiful expression in the original is that God had 'loved him out' of the pit of destruction."

"And then he made such a mistake about the ambassadors!"

"The Lord let him know a bit what a poor creature he was. Yes, Tiny, the ambassadors must have come pretty soon after the event which was the occasion of their coming. Their mission was twofold. See the account in Chronicles. They brought compliments from the king of Babylon, who also desired to be informed accurately respecting the miracle of the shadow on the dial; but undoubtedly there was besides a secret purpose to get Hezekiah to join with Babylon and the help of Egypt to throw off the yoke of the king of Assyria."

"Was Babylon under Assyria?"

"At that time; and generally for a long series of years before that; a revolt now and then serving only to bring a new overthrow. This Merodach-baladan rebelled against Sennacherib just after that king's first expedition to Judea; was overcome, and fled to an island in the Persian Gulf. That was the end of him."

"Why was Hezekiah 'glad of them,' as Isaiah says?"

"Proud of his great riches and state; perhaps glad too of the secret purpose of their mission. Hezekiah was in great prosperity, and his magnificence, we see, was worth admiring. See 2 Chron. xxxii. 27–29. Evidently this was prior to the time when, to appease Sennacherib, he had to strip the very gold plate from the doors and posts of the Temple."

"Of course, it must have been. Then when did Sennacherib come?"

"The records are confused. I will not undertake to decide. According to the Assyrian monuments, it was not till near the end of Hezekiah's reign. It was at any rate in the fifth year of Sennacherib. Now take your maps, children. Ekron, the city of Philistia, had been dependent upon Assyria;

but had lately rebelled, entered into alliance with Egypt, and sent its king, Padi, in chains, to Hezekiah to be kept or killed. Hezekiah did not put him to death, but of course by taking charge of him made himself a partner in Ekron's revolt. Perhaps he too was then looking towards an alliance with Egypt, as he certainly did later. Sennacherib went first against the king of Sidon, or of all Phœnicia, who had also cast off his yoke, and who fled at his coming. Sennacherib established another prince in his room, ordered things in that province; then went down along the coast to Askelon. The rebel prince here was taken prisoner with all his family and carried off to Assyria; Hazor, Joppa, and one or two more dependent towns, were reduced; and then Sennacherib went farther south, to meet and quell the Egyptian power. The records say that an enormous host had come from Egypt to help Ekron; and another battle, the second, between Egypt and Assyria, was fought near a place called Eltekeh, not far from Ekron. Assyria again won a tremendous victory. Eltekeh of course was taken; then Ekron. The principal men of the place were impaled dead or alive, all round the walls; and lesser people carried away for slaves. Then Sennacherib turned his attention to Hezekiah and Judea. Now read 2 Kings xviii. 13-16."

We read it.

"This says nothing of all you have been telling us, sir."

"No. It was outside of the purpose of the Scripture."

"Where do you get it?"

"From the Assyrian records. And they give us much more. I will read you an extract from Sennacherib's own story of this campaign, as translated by several of the most eminent oriental scholars, and then we will see how far the Bible records harmonise with it. Sennacherib's story reads on this wise—

"'Because Hezekiah king of Judah would not submit to my yoke, I came up against him, and by force of arms and the might of my power I took forty-six of his strong fenced cities'":—

"The Bible agrees with that," said Dan.

"'—and of the smaller towns which were scattered about I took and plundered a countless number. And from these places I captured and carried off as spoil 200,150 people, old and young, male and female, together with horses and mares, asses and camels, oxen and sheep, a countless multitude. And Hezekiah himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his capital city, like a bird in a cage, building towers round the city to hem him in, and raising banks of earth against the gates, so as to prevent escape. . . . Then upon this Hezekiah fell the fear of the power of my arms, and he sent out to me the chiefs and the elders of Jerusalem with thirty talents of gold and eight hundred talents of silver, and divers treasures, a rich and immense booty. . . . All these things were brought to me at Nineveh, the seat of my government,—Hezekiah having sent them by way of tribute, and as a token of submission to my power.'"

"Uncle Sam, do you believe it? The Bible does not say Jerusalem was besieged."

"Isaiah said it would be. Read Isa. xxix. 1–8. There is the description of a siege, even as Sennacherib describes it; the towers and the mounds and the surrounding forces in camp, and the great humiliation of the city; though the prophecy goes on to declare deliverance. Now read, children, the description in Isaiah xxiv. 1–12. That fits the state of things when Sennacherib was overrunning the land and carrying off everything. And now see what the Lord thought of alliances with Egypt, ch. xxx. 1–17, and xxxi. 1–9."

"Oh, that is beautiful, Uncle Sam!" I said.

"But I thought," said Priscilla, "I thought under Hezekiah the people had grown good again?"

"Only in appearance. Outside work. Hezekiah was true, and many others, no doubt; but not the mass of the people. See Isa. xxix. 13–16."

"I should think, though, if Sennacherib really laid siege to the city, there would have been more about it," said Dan.

"There is more. Remember, however, the main fact was that Hezekiah was terrified into submission; the city

suffered no injury; and the Bible record has not room for any but needful details. Now open your books, children, at the 22d chapter of Isaiah, and let us consider it."

"'The burden of the valley of vision.'—Uncle Sam, Jerusalem is not in a valley."

"It is certain, however, that Jerusalem is the place meant. In a valley it is not; and yet it is surrounded by mountains higher than itself. Besides, Delitzsch says that Jerusalem was, figuratively, 'an enclosed place, hidden and shut off from the world,' like a literal valley; and so the epithet applies. Jerusalem is the place, at any rate. Go on, Liph."

"'What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the housetops?' What for?"

"To gaze at the coming Assyrians. Such a sight had not been seen in Jerusalem for many a day; and it must have been almost in an equal degree beautiful and fearful. Over the hills, from the north-east to the north-west, the columns of the advancing enemy must have been stately and terrible to see. The closed ranks, with coats of mail and shields; the bristling spears, coming over the mountains as far as the eye could reach; bodies of archers with their quivers of death; worst of all, the horsemen, on spirited horses richly caparisoned, and the chariots making the ground tremble with their wheels. So the terrified inhabitants of the city would crowd to the housetops to look."

"But did they never come! the Assyrian army, I mean?" Dan asked.

"As I told you, the Assyrian records certify it, and the words of Scripture in various places verify it; though as this first attack of Sennacherib really resulted in nothing but Hezekiah's submission and tribute, just that is recorded; and the writer of the annals goes on to tell of the more remarkable second invasion, when Jerusalem was delivered with so wonderful a deliverance. There was no siege that second time; this time evidently the army encamped before the gates. Read on."

"I cannot make out the next two verses. The city was not taken."

"Never, by the Assyrians; and it is an Assyrian army that is described here. Either these words refer to the destruction and captivity that had fallen upon the country outside of Jerusalem; or the prophet's vision sees distant and near parts of essentially the same overthrow of his nation and city, in one blended view. Read the fourth and fifth verses. . . . 'Breaking down the walls' may refer to the ruin of the many fortified towns which Sennacherib had taken; 'crying to the mountains,' means a cry of distress which the mountains echo back again. The prophet, seeing all this in vision beforehand, and seeing the godless, careless, light-mindedness of the people, is in inconsolable grief. He goes on further to describe what he sees. Elam and Kir were two provinces of the Assyrian empire, south and north respectively, unless Kir was a part of Mesopotamia. Elam being the Susiana of later time, and Kur the name of a river which empties into the Caspian Sea. The valleys filled with chariots and horsemen, would mean especially the Kidron valley at the north, where it is shallow, and the valley of Gihon on the north-west; no doubt also the opening of the valley of Hinnom down here below us, where the king's gardens once were. Now, spear and shield and chariot and preparations for attack were there; and Jerusalem was helplessly looking out at them from her housetops. Read now verses 8-11."

"Explain, Uncle Sam."

"Judah's time of extremity has come. In haste and terror the king and the people take measures for defence. They get out the arms stored in the house of the forest of Lebanon; they notice the weak places in the walls of the city, and break down houses to get material for building up the breaches. Then verses 9 and 11 refer to Hezekiah's famous plan for securing the water of the Gihon springs for the city supply; the conduit and the reservoir which he had made before the Assyrians came; we will talk of that afterwards. *Now* I want you to notice that all the measures

of the king and the people looked to self-help; they did not trust in God."

"Hezekiah too!" said I.

"Hezekiah was a man, and sense was too much for faith on this occasion. If the tales of Assyrian fierceness and cruelty spent upon the broken towns of Judah had reached the capital, it is not wonderful that there should be a great trembling in Jerusalem. But it was mere human fear, no thought of God, no feeling of *His* displeasure, no turning to Him; so when Hezekiah compounded with his powerful foe and agreed to pay any tribute the conqueror pleased, and the armies were withdrawn accordingly from before the walls, there was only one feeling; rejoicing and feasting and a thoughtless making the most of the minute with no care for the future. So you can understand verses 12–14."

"Who is this Shebna, in the 15th verse?"

"One of Hezekiah's highest officers, indeed the highest of all, who I suppose had favoured alliance with the Egyptian prince, and had led Hezekiah away from good counsels. He was 'over the house,' master of the household; all the rule of the king's home affairs was in his hand. And in this important position his influence had been for evil; and in his pride and self-consequence he was counting on long power, and after the fashion of such magnates, cutting a sepulchre for himself in the rock somewhere near the city. So Isaiah foretells his contemptuous dismission from office. It seems from the terms used that Shebna's sepulchre was a very ambitious one, perhaps cut in the slope of the hill of Zion, high up, where the sepulchres of the kings were. But now, children, let us go back a little. Isaiah speaks of the gathering of 'the waters of the lower pool.' The book of Kings gives it only an incidental notice; 2 Kings xx. 20. But in Chronicles we have more details. Read 2 Chron. xxxii."

I read the first verse.

"That probably refers to Sennacherib's first campaign against Egypt and Judah. Now read to the 8th verse."

And when I had read, he went on. "You know the upper pool of Gihon; we were there a few days ago."

"It was dry, sir," said Liph.

"Well. In the time of Ahaz apparently there was a pool and a conduit there. And plenty of water, so that a brook flowed through the valley, fed by springs somewhere higher up, which are now unknown. Hezekiah said, why should the king of Assyria come and find all this supply? So he gathered a large number of people together who could do a great work in a short time; stopped the fountains and the upper watercourse, covering and hiding them, and making an underground conduit to bring all that store of water into the city; where it was collected and received in a pool 'between the walls.'"

"And he stopped the springs so that they have never been found since?"

"The region is dry enough now."

"Is the pool 'between the walls' still in existence?"

"I cannot say. There is a pool called Hezekiah's and between walls, as you say, which receives its supply by a conduit from the upper pool in the time of rains; but it is not an underground conduit. You shall go and see it."

"It seems to me, that was a great work, sir."

"No doubt of it."

"Why should Isaiah find fault?"

"Ah, Liph! see his own words. 'Because ye looked not to the maker thereof.' They were trusting in their own methods; and wise as the methods may be, that will not do."

Uncle Sam took us to see the so-called pool of Hezekiah next day. It is a large, large place, two hundred and forty feet one way by one hundred and forty-four feet the other, he said; and it used to be larger once, for the old wall of it has been discovered sixty feet farther to the north than the edge of the pool now. The bottom is rock, levelled and covered with cement; and as it was really between two of the city walls, it seems quite likely that this is Hezekiah's work. But the underground conduit is not here. We looked at the pool and wondered. House walls border it now.

CHAPTER XVII.

SENNACHERIB AND NINEVEH.

"How long after Sennacherib's first invasion before he came again?"

"Cannot tell with certainty. The Assyrian records do not fix it; nor the Bible annals, except inferentially. Two or three years probably intervened. First of all, I want you to read the 10th chapter of Isaiah. It gives you the Bible view of the whole Assyrian affair. The chapter begins with rebuking the unrighteous people of Judah; then goes on verse 5."

"'A hypocritical nation,'" said I, reading; "'the people of my wrath.' 'To tread them down like the mire of the streets.' Uncle Sam, this must have been before Sennacherib's first coming."

"I think so. But read on."

We read on till we came to the 28th verse, and there stopped in doubt.

"It is a description of the approach of the Assyrians on the side of the north; and is very grand. The prophet sees them in vision and describes what he sees. 'He is come to Aiath'—that is the same as Ai, not very far from Bethel; there first, coming from that side, the Assyrian would enter the kingdom of Judah, which you know took in Benjamin. Migron was a place near Bethel. Michmash you remember, coming still nearer to Jerusalem, on the north of the deep wady near which we lunched one day, when we went to see Geba. 'At Michmash he leaves his baggage.' The next step is to cross the ravine to Geba; at Geba they lodge for the night. You comprehend that 'Ramah is afraid,' and 'Gibeah of Saul flees.' You recollect Gibeah, do you not? *Tuliel el Fûl*, it is called; not Gibeon. Gallim and Laish

were places still further on the way, and Anathoth you have seen, haven't you? that is Anâtâ, about an hour and a quarter to the north of us. So the march is described, coming closer and closer, till at last, at Nob, 'he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion.' Nob is believed to have been the hill just north of Jerusalem, up yonder, from which we come down the Kidron valley."

"Uncle Sam, when did the Assyrians come this way? I thought they came up from the south-west. Sennacherib was fighting the Egyptians or the Philistines first."

"There is nothing to decide your question positively, Dan. It is conceivable that at Sennacherib's first invasion, described in Isa. xxii., he may have detached a body of his army to come down over the heights of Ephraim and Benjamin, while he himself went on to Eltekeh and Ekron. That is supposable. On the other hand, some of the wisest and best scholars think this magnificent description is an ideal one, giving the impression made by the Assyrian's sweeping approach, but painting the approach in a direction which he never took."

"I don't like that," said Dan. "Why could not Isaiah describe his coming by the way of the south as well, if he never came by the way of the north?"

"I fail to see, my boy. But let us go on now to what is certain. In Isaiah's tenth chapter you see the spirit and temper and designs of the proud conqueror; and you see the Lord's view of him and of them. Now come to the 30th of Isaiah. Read the first seven verses. You see Hezekiah and the people were seeking help and alliance from Egypt. Then, verses 8–13, see the temper and spirit of the people, under all the good exterior of Hezekiah's reign. Then, chap. xxxi. 1–3, again, the rebuke of those who trusted in earthly help. You wondered, children, that Sennacherib should have been allowed to come; do you not see that both king and people needed a sharp lesson? So we come now to Isa. xxxvi. The history is given in Kings too, nearly as here. The first verse may refer to the

first invasion; the next verse at any rate brings us into the affairs of the second. Sennacherib had gone against Egypt really; but the rebellious king of Judah with his very strong capital city could not be passed by. From Lachish, down in the plain, seven hours westward of Beit-jibrin, Sennacherib sent a strong detachment of his forces to Jerusalem. Lachish was a well fortified place, no doubt, and gave him trouble. He sent also three of his chief officers. The names given 2 Kings xviii. 17 are official titles. Tartan was first in command; the word means Commander-in-chief. Rab-saris meant the Chief Eunuch, an officer high in the royal household; and Rabshakeh was the chief Cup-bearer. That, you know, was one of the most influential posts in an Eastern court."

"These officers with their army came and planted themselves in the open valley to the west of the city, by 'the conduit of the upper pool.' That conduit led the water from the upper pool down the valley to the lower pool; but now, you know, Hezekiah had turned off the flow and led it underground into the city. There the generals took their stand, just where, years before, Ahaz had refused the offer brought him by Isaiah and chosen to trust in the king of Assyria. Here they stood 'and called to the king' (Kings xviii. 18). Hezekiah regarded it very justly as beneath his dignity to confer with them. He sent his chief officers. Eliakim, you see, was now over the household, in place of Shebna deposed; however, Shebna still held so far the favour of the king that he was chancellor, or scribe as it is translated; secretary of state. His business was to draw up public papers. Then the recorder, the third officer, was different again. It was for him to keep the annals of the kingdom; combine and unite the papers and records written by the scribe or chancellor into an organised whole. Both officers are said to be common in the East down to our times. Now go on and read, and ask me what you will. 'The great king' is the regular title of the kings of Assyria, at least of Sennacherib and his father, upon the monuments."

"What did Rabshakeh mean in verse 7?"

"A natural mistake for him to make. He had heard of Hezekiah's reforms, and did not understand that the God of the Jews would be pleased by them."

"Then verse 8, Uncle Sam. Hadn't Hezekiah two thousand men?"

"But not two thousand horsemen. That powerful arm of the service was wanting to him entirely."

"Verse 10? How came Rabshakeh to say that?"

"Possibly some of the sayings of the prophets had come to his ears, which he artfully used in this way. Altogether, his speech was fitted to drive Hezekiah's officers to despair. So they naïvely asked him to use a language that the people would not understand."

"But how came Rabshakeh to know Jewish?"

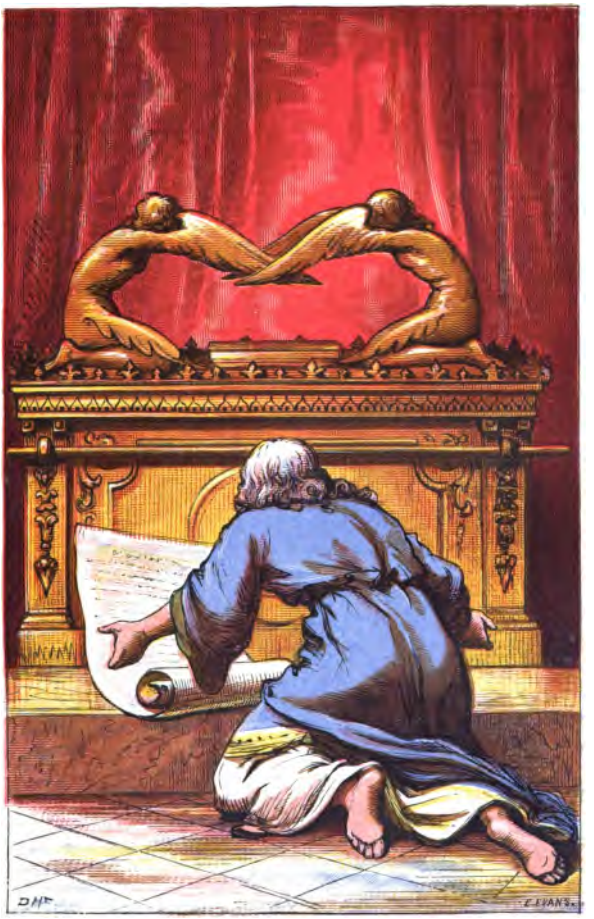
"The Assyrian and the Hebrew are very close together; a person understanding one could very easily understand the other. On the other hand, Syrian, or Aramæan, was used for communication between educated persons of different nations in the middle and west of Asia. It was the tongue spoken in Syria and Babylonia."

"Rabshakeh came so near, then, that the people in the city could hear him."

"A little beyond the walls to the west there. And the walls were crowded with people, watching and listening to what was going on. Read the rest of the speech. Hamath and Arpad, two of the cities named, lay in northern Syria; Sepharvaim was a city on the Euphrates. Hena and Iva mentioned in Kings, probably also on the Euphrates."

We read on, till we came to the seventh verse of the next chapter. "A blast and a rumour?" said Dan. "I thought Sennacherib's army was destroyed?"

"First came the rumour. Rabshakeh found his master gone from Lachish, and set down before Libnah. His real object, you must remember, was Egypt. It seems that Sethos, a prince of lower Egypt, was prepared to resist him; and Sennacherib now heard that the great Ethiopian king, Tirhakeh, was on his way to join forces with Sethos. This was critical. Sennacherib did not want to leave Jerusalem



"Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread the letter before the Lord."

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unsubdued in his rear, and so sent messengers again from Libnah with the letter which he hoped would overawe the king of Judah."

"And it did," said Liph. "Here are more names, sir, that we do not know."

"Gozan is a district of Armenia, on the Khabour. Haran you know, in northern Mesopotamia. Reseph was between the Euphrates and Palmyra. Telassar was on the east of the Tigris."

So we read on, all of ch. xxxvii.

"In verse 29, sir, the words 'my hook in thy nose' are strange words, it seems to me."

"Not strange at all. That was the way the Assyrian conqueror sometimes treated captives whom he specially wished to humiliate. The sculptures show them with rings let into either the nose or the lips, from which a line went to the hand of the conqueror."

"But how could God do that to Sennacherib?"

"He has ways of doing it to men often, when they do not suspect it. You know how the king of Assyria was obliged to go home by the way he came, and with no gain for his trouble."

"What do the Assyrian records say about this campaign?"

"Nothing whatever. They are silent."

"Then what is the 'sign' in verse 30?"

"In the first year, the year of invasion, operations of agriculture would all be hindered; the people must eat that which grew of itself. But this would happen the second year also; the enemy would not be gone out of the land in time for that year's ploughing and sowing. The third year all would go on as it used to do, and by this Hezekiah might know the certainty of the things prophesied. Beyond this, the *sign* looks further, and is a token for the deliverance of Judah. Judah too, the remnant of Judah, should strike root again and flourish."

"When, Uncle Sam?"

"Partially, then. Again, more signally, at the return from

the captivity. Again at the time of the Roman destruction. At the last, again! It is the history of the Church."

"Uncle Sam, it says, Sennacherib went back, and 'dwelt at Nineveh.' Was his power broken?"

"No. The loss of one army could not do that for him. Sennacherib dwelt seventeen years at Nineveh before his death; during which he carried on more campaigns against various nations, but not again against Judah. And his son, Esar-haddon, ruled over all the territory possessed by the mightiest of his fathers."

"Well, one thing more. *Nisroch;* what sort of a god was that?"

"The vulture-headed deity, with a human figure and wings. It seems to have been the principal deity of the Assyrians. He appears on the walls and embroidered on dresses, fighting with human-headed bulls or lions, and getting the upper hand. Now, children, before we go further with the history, we must notice one thing. Assyria was a type of the world-power, which is antagonistic to the Church and would swallow it up. Therefore the overthrow of Assyria and the saving of the Lord's people from its oppressions and rule was a type of the greater deliverance wrought by Christ. And accordingly, you find the prophets speaking of the one and of the other deliverance as it were in a breath; in mingled phrases, part of which belong to the nearer, typical deliverance, and part to the further and spiritual."

"Sir," said Liph, "could you call Assyria a *world-power?*"

"Very justly. It ruled the known world, Liph. Esar-haddon, son of Sennacherib, held all his father held; and in the reign of Asshur-bannipal II., *his* son, the empire was quiet and consolidated. No power lifted itself to rebel, or only stirred to bring down chastisement upon itself. Egypt was subdued, and put under rulers appointed by Assyria. Tyre, Moab, Edom, Babylon, Elam, Armenia, Arabia, all had submitted. Judea appears to have been a quiet tributary. There was nothing left for Assyria to do, to establish her power or better her mercantile possibilities. She was great and rich, and splendid and imperious. But she had

oppressed the Lord's people. And so in the height of her power and pride went forth the sentence of the Lord against her. Find the book of Nahum, which is mainly busied with it. You see he begins with the words, 'The burden of Nineveh.' Then, after some preliminaries, he goes on in the eighth verse,—'With an overrunning flood He [the Lord] will make an utter end of the place thereof.' Now nothing could be more unlikely. Nineveh was a place of wonder, for strength as well as magnificence. It seems to have been, in a sort, an agglomeration of several cities, but encircled with a boundary wall which no engines of war then known could break down, unless they had been in the hands of an inexhaustible army. They were one hundred feet high, and wide enough for three chariots to drive abreast. Their circuit was sixty miles; so that the inhabitants could always grow corn enough for their wants on ground enclosed within their own ramparts, and there could be no starving-out of such a city. The walls were further defended by twelve hundred towers, each two hundred feet high. The inhabitants were strong and warlike; no siege imaginable could be successful against them. Yet Nahum declared not only Nineveh's overthrow, but that it should utterly pass away and be forgotten."

"Then how *was* it overcome?" said Liph. "If it was unconquerable."

"As Nahum said, 'with a flood.' See chap. ii. 6. 'The gates of the rivers shall be opened.' Around the circuit of the walls there was a broad and deep moat; and one at least of Nineveh's rivers ran through the city. Of course its exit was defended by gates. And while an enemy lay encamped before the walls, a sudden flood came which swelled the Tigris and the lesser river which emptied into it, burst the gates, and left a way open into the place. Then, it is said, seeing destruction at hand, the king gathered a quantity of his richest treasures together into a pile, with his wives and himself, and burned all down. And the state of the ruins of the palaces shows constantly that fire, and very fierce fire, was a principal agent in the destruction of them. Great

slabs of sculptured alabaster are charred through and spoiled."

"Let us see what Nahum says about it," said Dan. "Ch. i. 9 reads, 'What do ye imagine against the Lord?'—what *had* they imagined against Him?"

"Do you forget Sennacherib's threats and boasting against the Lord and against His chosen people?"

"Oh!" said Dan. "Then that is what verse 11 means. Then this was written before the destruction of Sennacherib's army?"

"Certainly. And the Lord declares Judah's deliverance from his rule; and then the sweet prediction in verse 15 looks further, to the breaking of a yoke which the Assyrian only exemplified and typified. Read Luke i. 68–75."

Dan read it, and then we went back to Nahum. We read the description of the attack and defence, ii. 1–8.

"How was Nineveh like a pool of water?"

"'Of old.' Standing, at rest and quiet; knowing no changes."

"What is the meaning of all these lions, verses 11-13?"

"That refers to the savage ferocity, violence, cruelty, rapacity of the nation. They were a family of lions."

"Very rich they must have been! 'No end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture.'"

"'Full of lies and robbery' too."

"But notice, children, great and mighty as she had been, Nineveh was to pass away *utterly*. See iii. 15–17. She was to disappear like a flight of locusts that have done their work. Her captains and her crowned had been mighty, but they would be gone, 'and their place is not known where they are.' So for many and many an age, the very site of Nineveh, 'that great city,' was forgotten and lost. Nothing could be more unlikely when Nahum foretold it, for Nineveh was a merchant city as well as a warlike; but the Lord said it, and 'there was no healing of her bruise.' So for ages, children, there have been left just the long, low, irregular ridges extending for miles, where her ramparts and palaces

once were. They looked like low ranges of hilly ground; nobody knew they were anything else; and under them lay hidden all the while the alabaster carvings and the magnificent foundations of Sennacherib and his fellow-kings."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MANASSEH.

"THE history is growing terribly interesting now," Priscilla remarked the next evening.

"It has been that all along."

"Not *terribly* interesting. But now I want to be studying all the while."

"I will get you Layard's 'Nineveh' as soon as I can," Uncle Sam said. "You will like to study that. For the present we must be content with the Bible and the country. We come to Manasseh's reign now. Read all through 2 Kings xxi. and 2 Chronicles xxxiii., and then you may ask questions."

"How could there be such a sudden change from good to bad?"

"Recollect what Isaiah and Micah had testified of the moral and spiritual condition of the people. A good king put a certain fair covering of external forms over all this, through which the Lord's eyes looked and were not deceived. A few true servants of God; an inwardly corrupt court and nation; that was the real state of things. When Manasseh came to the crown he was still very young, and the wrong set of counsellors got hold of him. False priests, false prophets who 'prophesied smooth things,' false statesmen who recommended alliances with Egypt, false courtiers who flattered the king with everything which could minister to his selfish pleasures. So Manasseh quite slipped the bridle and forsook the ways which were right."

"The 'high places' in verse 3, Uncle Sam?"

"For the worship of idols. Then altars for Baal and an *Asherah*, translated 'grove;' a wooden image of Astarte. To these, which had been in Judah before, Manasseh

brought in a third worship for the first time; that of the stars. Probably he got this from the East. In the Phœnician star-worship, Keil says, the sun and moon were regarded as emblems of nature powers, and worshipped under the names of Baal and Astarte; but the Chaldean star-worship was different; paying honour to them as immovable and unchangeable, and so regulating the changes of earthly things. At the beginning of this superstition the stars and heavenly bodies were worshipped without altars or offerings or image. See Job xxxi. 26, 27, and Deut. iv. 19, and xvii. 3; and that worship the Lord had forbidden. Now altars were built upon housetops, incense was burnt to the stars, the face of the worshipper turning to the east as the quarter from which the sun, and the stars too, make their appearance. Incense was offered to the signs of the zodiac, to the sun and moon, to the planets; and with this worship also were mingled astrology, divination, and various forms of soothsaying. There were also chariots and horses sacred to the sun, which we find mentioned later; Manasseh did not neglect to have them."

"And he put these altars in the courts of the Temple!"

"See also what Jeremiah says, xix. 13—and Zeph. i. 5. See the description given later by Ezekiel viii. 16. You see there were altars for star-worship on all the roofs in Jerusalem. No doubt it became a fashionable religion, and probably was reckoned extremely refined and æsthetical."

"Manasseh was not confined to æsthetical religions," said Dan. "He introduced Moloch again."

"What is a 'familiar spirit'?"

"The spirit of a departed person, come back to hold intercourse with the living."

"Is *that* it?" cried Dan. "Why, that is like what people pretend nowadays."

"They didn't really come back, did they, Uncle Sam?"

"My dear, I don't know. I only know that the Lord forbade having anything to do with them, real or pretended. See Lev. xix. 31 and Deut. xviii. 9–14. The worship of Moloch was specially connected with soothsaying and

divination. And every sort of endeavour by such means to get behind the Lord's providence and spy into the future, was and is strictly forbidden."

"Why, Uncle Sam?"

"My dear, it is looking away from God and depending on some other power; and the whole thing is therefore a bit of old-time idolatrous superstition; and if there is any power at all at work in it, it is the power of devils, not of God. Go on."

"He set the *image of the grove?*"——

"The image of Asherah, or Astarte. He put it in the house, that is, in the Holy Place, where the incense altar, the shewbread table, and the candlestick were. Which of them he displaced for it we are not told. Perhaps neither, but the horrid abomination stood there in the midst of the emblems of what is loftiest and loveliest in the religion of Christ."

"Uncle Sam, Manasseh did not know that."

"He did not wish to know. And such ignorance is hopeless. Look at Chron. v. 16; it appears the brazen altar was injured. See Jer. vii. 17, 18, for a description of the state of things in the city. A description written later, but it may help you to imagine how the prevalence of the new star-worship filled Jerusalem with the vainest idolatry. But of all that he did, I suppose the putting that vile image in the Holy Place was the worst."

"Why was the image so vile, sir? worse than others?"

"The worship connected with it, Liph, was one of the most low and degrading. Close by the house of the Lord was a house for the women who wove hangings for this image. Altars of brick were in the gardens and on the house-tops of the city, on which incense was burnt to the stars. In all Judah as well as in Jerusalem the very children were gathering the sticks with which their mothers baked the cakes to be offered to the Queen of heaven. It seemed as if every false belief and every sort of idol-worship was rife in the land at once; even to human sacrifices,

and witchcraft and sorcery and familiar spirits and astrology and soothsaying of every variety."

"I suppose the worship of God was carried on too, sir?"

"My dear, I do not know. But I know a persecution broke out against the Lord's true people. You can imagine that their horror and indignation would be beyond all bounds, and they could not keep silence; and you can imagine, too, that Manasseh and his counsellors would not tolerate their rebukes. Think how Isaiah would feel and speak! He must have been an old man now of eighty or ninety years. Any how, Manasseh filled Jerusalem with blood '*from one end to another;*' that seems to say that executions were very frequent and in the public open streets. Josephus says the prophets were killed every day, and tradition goes that the aged Isaiah was 'sawn asunder' at this time. See what Jeremiah says, ii. 30, 'your own sword hath destroyed your prophets like a devouring lion.' Indeed, tradition goes that the king even had the name of Jehovah erased from all public documents."

"That is only tradition, sir."

"Certainly; and we will not insist upon it. What is certain, is that Manasseh did what could not be pardoned; Manasseh and Judah together."

"I thought Judah had done that already, when Isaiah got his commission, long before."

"True; and yet upon the repentance and reform under Hezekiah the Lord deferred His anger, put off the evil day, delivered them from the Assyrian. Now read the verses 2 Kings xxi. 10–15."

"What is the 'line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab'?"

"A line and plummet, you know, are used to secure the exact and perfect erection of a building. The terms are employed to denote the exact and square justice which should be done. See Amos vii. 7."

"What is 'the remnant of mine inheritance'?"

"Here it means the people of Judah, with those who had cleaved to them out of other tribes. The others, you

remember, had been carried away and settled in countries beyond the river, whence they never came back."

"But then, Uncle Sam, this *remnant* had not provoked the Lord since the day their fathers came out of Egypt?"

"The Lord says they had. Nations are units, Liph, as I have told you. And just as in the life of an individual, so in the life of a nation; there may be repentance and pardon, or there may be an accumulation of wrath, which in the latter case may break at last upon the heads of a generation far removed in time from those who first began to store it up. Look back at 2 Sam. vii. 10, and 1 Kings ix. 6-9. Even now, in this wicked reign, there came a sort of repentance, and consequently a reprieve of mercy. Go over to 2 Chron. xxxiii. 10, 11. It does not appear that there was any invasion of Judea, or any fighting on the part of its people. Apparently Manasseh had followed the policy which was popular, and entered into negotiations with Egypt. And Esar-haddon, Sennacherib's son and successor, sent a force into the land, which caught Manasseh as he was attempting to flee—so we may suppose—and carried him off to Babylon. Esar-haddon had draughted a fresh importation of foreigners into Samaria from Babylonia and Susiana, and countries still more to the east. In connection with this expedition possibly may have been the bringing away of Manasseh. Esar-haddon had built himself a palace at Babylon, and sometimes held his court there; which explains why Manasseh was not taken to Nineveh. Esar-haddon is said to have built thirty-six palaces with the labour of foreign captives; and he gives the names of twenty-two kings who supplied him with materials for his palace at Nineveh. Manasseh was one of them. The kings of Edom and Tyre, and of Philistine cities, were others."

"Uncle Sam, how long was Manasseh in Babylon?"

"I do not know. However, it is likely he was not there long. Esar-haddon reigned but thirteen years; and it seems probable that Manasseh's captivity and restoration fell within the last three of them. He was returned to Judea as a

tributary and vassal of the king of Assyria, and behaved himself as such thenceforth."

"But, sir, he began to fortify Jerusalem immediately."

"Not for defence against Assyria. He had got enough of that, or he certainly soon would. Judah and Jerusalem were a valuable outwork and barrier for Assyria against Egypt, Jerusalem being a very strong place. Egypt had been well conquered by Esar-haddon, who went south as far as Thebes, and divided the country into twenty governments, placing rulers over them at his pleasure. Manasseh, and Josiah after him, had little to hope for in that quarter. Their best policy was to be true to their Eastern master."

"What wall did he build—Manasseh, I mean—'on the west side of Gihon,' verse 14?"

"Westward toward Gihon, better. This is taken to be the same wall that Hezekiah built; the 'other wall without,' Chron. xxxii. 5. Manasseh strengthened it, or made it higher. So about Ophel."

"Then he took away his altars and statue out of the Temple. Was it a true reform, Uncle Sam?"

"He ceased to dishonour the Temple with idolatrous images and practices, and restored the Temple service. But these things which he removed were not destroyed; Josiah found them still in existence, and possibly in use; Amon may have reinstated them. No, there is no question of a thorough and popular reform. Yet to so much humility and repentance as the king showed, you see the Lord gave great grace. There was no heart repentance in the people. Amon's short reign followed in the line of his father's teachings and early example, of which his own name gives an indication. Amon was the designation of one of the chief gods of Egypt."

"Josiah was better," said I, sighing.

"Josiah was a child when he was made king. There were eight more years of unchecked evil before, 'while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father;' and four years more still before he was wise enough and strong enough to begin to stem the tide of wickedness in

city and country. So there were ten or twelve years after Manasseh's death, during which wickedness ran riot."

"Were there no prophets to tell the people?"

"Yes. Isaiah was dead, and Micah was gone, even before Isaiah; but somewhere in the latter part of Manasseh's reign, or in these ten or twelve years after him, Habakkuk wrote his prophecy, and no doubt preached; and just after or alongside of him came Zephaniah. Do you want to know what they said?"

We drew our camp stools a little closer, with a certain satisfaction. It was always a special pleasure to me to go into discussion of the prophets. Liph put on a critical face, doubtful and questioning, even before Uncle Sam had said a word; Prissy and Dan were serious and eager. I opened my Bible at Habakkuk.

"'The burden'—Why does he call it a burden?"

"It is a very frequent word in the mouths of the prophets. They used it, because what had been shown them to declare *was* a burden; heavy and hard to bear. The word is never given except with that meaning."

"What was Habakkuk's burden?" Liph asked.

"First, the destruction which was coming by the hands of the Chaldees. But read his words about the iniquity which was calling it down, i. 2–4. You see how grieved the prophet's heart was at the state of things around him. Every sort of evil was prevalent; and the Lord's servant wondered that the Lord delayed His judgment. Habakkuk asked 'why?' and 'how long?' and then he goes on to foretell the sweeping destruction which should by and by come. Read verses 5–11.

"What was there so marvellous about it?" Liph asked.

"Nothing could have been said which would seem at the time more unlikely. The Chaldees were not even an independent power; Judea had nothing to fear from them. Assyria was mistress of the world; she had grasped in her hand the reins of all the kingdoms, and held them firmly; see Ezekiel's description of her, xxxi. 3–9. Babylon was a subject province, and had been so for long. The king of

Assyria had a palace in Babylon and sometimes held his court there. Nothing could be more unlikely than that danger would arise from Chaldea, for Assyria must be got rid of first. But you see, verse 7, Habakkuk speaks of her as an independent power; verse 10, as a great conquering power. Then in verse 12 he bursts out with his expression of faith, that for all this misery and violence God has not forgotten His people; this trouble is coming, not for utter destruction, but 'for judgment' and 'for correction.' Yet he wonders that the righteous God can see so much wrong done. See, in the after verses he speaks of the conquerors as sweeping up people in their net as fishers do the fish of the sea; and then in bewilderment he asks if they shall be permitted to empty their net, and go on with their career of wild ravaging."

"What is the meaning of 'sacrificing unto their net,' in verse 16?"

"They would exalt and worship their own power and be lifted up in pride. Verse 11 is rendered literally thus, 'Then he sweeps by, a wind, and passes, and is guilty; this his strength is his god.'"

"That is exactly Nebuchadnezzar," said I. "I don't understand verse 9, Uncle Sam."

"As the east wind devours and dries up all before it, so would they make everything desert; and they would gather captives 'as the sand.' The second chapter tells in detail of the judgment upon the several vices of the Chaldeans. Now turn over to Zephaniah."

I looked across to the city over against us, illuminated as it was by the declining sun. It had been the city where Isaiah and Micah and Habakkuk had declared their message, they and so many others; and the sun was shining to-day on the fulfilment of their words. Walls and houses were there yet, it is true, built up over the ruins; but the people were gone. Just a few poor old Jews wandered back here to die! And the hills were witnesses. And once Zephaniah had cried aloud his warnings in the space encircled by those walls. I came back to the present, for Liph was reading, but my eyes went off again and again over the

Kidron valley, down the slopes of Olivet, off to the heights which, when Zephaniah and Habakkuk preached, were crowded with altars and sanctuaries of false gods. Liph read eleven verses and stopped.

"What is he talking about?"

"The destruction of the wicked. That is his theme. General, universal, utter destruction of the wicked. His words go to the last judgment of all, and only that can fully meet and exhaust their meaning; yet as preliminary to that, and an earnest of it, they take in the nearer judgments too; and first that wrought by the Chaldees."

"'I will utterly consume all things from off the land.' When that?"

"When 'the earth and all the works that are therein shall be burned up.' For you see the 'fishes of the sea' are included; all creation is included; what the Chaldees could not reach."

"'And the *stumbling-blocks* with the wicked?'" said I.

"Don't you recollect?—'They shall gather out of His kingdom *all things that offend*, and them that do iniquity; that is precisely what we have here."

"Then he comes to Judah."

"Because, as has been remarked, 'judgment must begin at the house of God.'"

"Who are the Chemarims?"

"That is the name by which the idolatrous priests were called. 'Swearing by Malcham'—the word means 'their king;' and is supposed to mean Moloch."

"Zephaniah must have spoken this at the time when everything was as bad as it could be; before Josiah's reformation."

"In verses 4–6 he goes over all classes of evil-doers. The Baal worshippers; the adherents of the star-worship; those who tried to keep up a half-and-half service, to swear by the Lord and to swear by their king, that is, the abomination of the Ammonites; those who have given up serving the Lord; and those who never tried to serve Him."

"But oh, Uncle Sam, what do the next words mean?"

"It is a figure often used by the prophets, and again in the Revelation. Those who would not serve the Lord, shall themselves be victims; and the 'guests' are those whom the Lord has called and chosen to be ministers and executors of His wrath."

"The 10th and 11th verses, Uncle Sam?"

"Describe the terrors of the overthrow of Jerusalem. The fish gate is supposed to have been in the north wall; so when the invader broke in, there would come a cry from that quarter; then a howl of despair from the 'second,' that is, the second city. The first was Zion, on the southern and highest hill westward of Moriah; the next fortified, with another wall enclosing it, was the second or lower city. Then follows a 'crashing from the hills'—from Moriah and Zion and all the heights of the city. Again and again, children, this description has been more or less exactly verified."

We finished that chapter, and read the next.

"Now, you see, from the punishment of the Lord's people the prophet turns to denounce woe on their enemies. And take notice; as has been well observed, at the time these denunciations were spoken, nothing to human eyes could seem more improbable. He begins with Philistia. The four cities mentioned were very strong. Ashdod stood a siege of twenty-nine years from the king of Egypt; and Gaza resisted the forces of Alexander for several months. But all its men died fighting, and the women and children were sold into slavery. Nothing was more unlikely than that *Judah* should succeed to the possession of those four cities, its hereditary enemies. However, in the time of the Maccabees they were all taken."

"What is left of them now?"

"Tiny, we will go and see."

I exclaimed, I believe, and Uncle Sam went on. "Gaza is a city still, though it has changed hands, been 'forsaken,' and renewed more times than I can tell. Nothing is left of Ekron. Ashdod and Askelon can be seen yet in their ruins. The prophet foretold the destruction of Judah, and

yet that Judah should possess the lands of the Philistines. The Cherethites are the same people. Then the prophet declares vengeance on Moab and Ammon, Israel's old foes. They were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, some years after the destruction of Jerusalem."

"And is their land such a ruin?"

"A terrible ruin. Rich as it is by nature, it is now but a waste of desolation, with remains in abundance to show its former populousness and importance."

"Uncle Sam, the prophet speaks of their *reviling* against Judah?"

"Yes, Tiny. This is not the only place where notice is taken of such reviling. I will give you some passages to look out. See Ezek. xxv. 1–7; xxxvi. 1–7; Jer. xlviii. 25–27; Isa. li. 7, 8; Ps. lvii. 3; lxxix. 12; lxxiv. 18–23; lxxxix. 50, 51; Isa. xxv. 8. And also the words of Christ, Rom. xv. 3. It is better not to speak against the people of God."

"Uncle Sam, verse 11 of Zephaniah. How would the Lord *famish* the gods of the earth?"

"Put a stop to all the sacrifices offered to them. Then in the latter part of the verse comes the promise of the Christian Church—all over the world."

"Then Nineveh takes her turn."

"Remember, when these words were written Nineveh was a glory of strength and beauty, and no enemy was in sight that could touch her. Yet the prophet promises perfect desolation even of the place where her palaces were most magnificent and her human-headed bulls guarded proudly every entrance. 'Flocks shall lie down in the midst of her.'"

"And it has been so ever since?"

"Ever since. And now, lately, people are digging into the mounds of her ruins and finding the remains of her splendour."

"And Ethiopia, Uncle Sam? there is a word about her."

"As joined with Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar did terrible work in Egypt, after he had visited Moab and Ammon; destroyed cities and carried people away captive."

"Then whom does Zephaniah mean by the 'oppressing city' in chap. iii.?"

"Jerusalem. See what Jerusalem was in the first four verses. Priest and prophet and rulers and common people, all evil alike. Then comes the terrible word, 'The just Lord is in the midst of her.' Day by day giving token of His justice and judgments; showing the people examples in the heathen nations round about, and correcting Judah herself; 'but they rose early and corrupted all their doings.' So then the destruction must come. But see, children, Zephaniah again looks beyond the near destruction to the great distant 'day of the Lord;' he gathers up all the destructions in one, as it were, and declares that the remnant saved and left, 'an afflicted and poor people,' shall be holy and shall be true. Christ will be their Shepherd, and feed them; there shall be no more trouble, even to be feared; they 'shall not see evil any more;' and the Lord will pour out upon His redeemed people all the riches of His love and treasures of His tenderness."

"O Uncle Sam! how could they hear and not mind?"

"Alas, Tiny, how can they hear and not mind now? It is the old story."

"Zephaniah preached, you say, sir, in the latter part of Manasseh's reign or the first part of Josiah's?"

"Somewhere there. Before Josiah's reformation."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PHILISTINE CITIES.

We set out the very next day to visit the sites of the Philistine cities. That day we made one long stage to Beit-jibrin, and there we pitched our tents again, nothing loth. Indeed, I think I enjoyed revisiting a place even more than the first time I saw it; associations had had time to get matured, and I knew and *felt* better where I was. We were greatly tired with our long ride; however, rest and dinner brought me up again; and we were all ready for our evening talk. We had our Bibles open at 2 Chron. xxxiv. and 2 Kings xxii.

"We have got a good king now," I said.

"The last one. Judah never saw another."

"He began to be good when he was sixteen years old. Uncle Sam, it was four years after that when he began to clear away allthe dreadful things that Amon had left?"

"Only twenty years old then. You would not expect a boy of sixteen to enter upon a great religious and political reform, when he was as yet only beginning to be good himself? No, he did very well. He began to have the idols and idolatrous altars taken away in the twelfth year of his reign. Next in order came the repair of the neglected and desecrated Temple, as in the time of Joash. Money was brought by the people, it seems, as then; and by the Levites who kept the door it was put in a chest, to be drawn out for the payment of the workmen. And in Kings xxii. 3 we have the king's order that this should be done. His secretary of state, Shaphan, was sent to Hilkiah with the message that he should count out the money and pay it over to the workmen. The overseers' names are given in Chronicles, and there too we are told that the governor of

the city and Joash the chancellor were sent with Shaphan. All this is to introduce the discovery which had been made. Hilkiah announced that he had found the book of the law."

"*The* book? Was there only one?"

"There were more; there must have been a number of copies in the land, for the language of the prophets shows that they were perfectly familiar with it. But nevertheless it had dropped out of knowledge of the court and the people; the very existence of it forgotten. Does that seem incredible to you? I can tell you, there are people sitting in all our churches, who would be very much astonished if they knew what is in the Bible. This was *the* copy of the Law which was ordered to be kept in the Temple. See Deut. xxxi. 24–26."

"Where did they find it now?"

"I cannot say. 'When they brought out the money,' the high-priest found the book. He handed it over to the secretary. The secretary opened and looked into it. Kings xxii. 8. Then Shaphan went back to the king and made his report, Chron. xxxiv. 16, 17; and finally produced the roll that had been found, and read aloud from it to the king. And evidently Josiah was hearing the words for the first time, for he rent his clothes in his alarm and distress."

"Why, Uncle Sam?"

"Turn back to Lev. xxvi., and read it; and Deut. xxviii. Suppose Shaphan had been struck by one of those passages, and had chosen it to read to the king."

"I understand," said I. "I do not wonder. Then what did Josiah send that commission for to Huldah? and who was she?"

"We know no more of Huldah. Hers is one of those many names of the Lord's servants that flash out upon the history and are seen no more. No more, until they shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. Josiah sent the commission, Tiny, to learn what was the state of the case now; how the Lord regarded the people, and whether there was any loophole of hope left. Huldah was the wife of the

'keeper of the wardrobe'—that is, either of the priests' dresses laid up in the Temple, or else of the king's wardrobe."

"Well, Josiah got a good answer," said Priscilla.

"A bad one, I think," said I.

"He received it like a good man. Instead of sitting down with the assurance of his own escape, he set about taking the most vigorous measures to bring back the people and the land to the Lord's favour, if it might be. And the first thing was to read to the people the words that had been read to him. The king stood, not 'by a pillar' (Kings xxiii. 3), but as in Kings xi. 14, probably upon the brazen scaffold that Solomon had made for his own use on such occasions. The law was read; and then the king made a solemn covenant to be the Lord's servant; and all the people made the covenant with him."

"One of their covenants!" said Liph. "How many times had they made it and broken it?"

"The event shows that in so far as they made it honestly now, they were moved by fear. It was not of the heart. But Josiah went on to do all *his* work thoroughly. Priests and Levites and prophets, he gathered every class, and all formally joined in the covenant. Then followed the clearing away of every relic of idolatry, out of the Temple, out of the city, and out of the land."

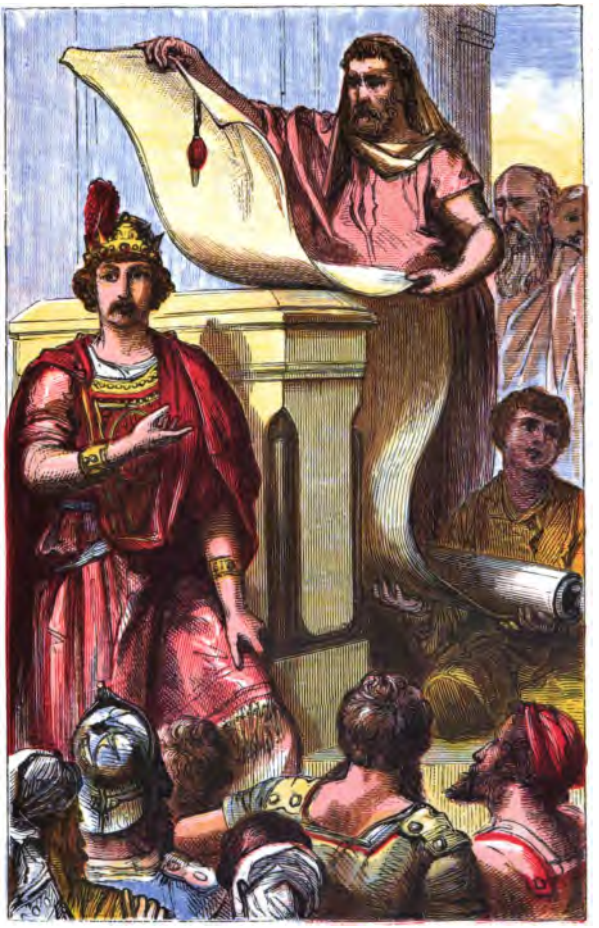
"The 'grove,' in Kings xxiii. 4, I suppose, means the Asherah, the wooden image in honour of Astarte; but how could the 'vessels' made for it be burnt? Were they not of some kind of metal?"

"Of course; but there are ways of calcining metals, as Moses did with the golden calf, don't you remember? Burnt they were, and ground or beat to powder, and strewed about on the open space in the upper end of the Kidron valley."

"We have not been there yet, Uncle Sam."

"No. We will go."

"The grove also, or the Asherah, they stamped to powder. I thought it was wooden."



"He read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord."

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"Plated with metal, perhaps, in this instance."

"Why should he bring all the priests from the cities up to Jerusalem, verse 8?"

"They had officiated at the high places, which Josiah now knew were illegal. Whatever was contrary to the law he would not tolerate. So he sent for the priests, to stop the work they were doing; and defiled the high places from Geba, the limit of the kingdom on the north, to Beersheba, its southernmost extremity. Even by the gates of Jerusalem there were high places. And these wrong-doing priests, see verse 9, he would not allow to serve in the Temple; he only allowed them to be nourished upon the usual priests' portion, like others who were disqualified from service by some bodily defect."

"Why did he throw the powder of the idol dust, verse 6, upon the graves?"

"You know, everything connected with death was ceremonially defiling; so a grave, or even a bone. The poor people buried them as now on the slopes of the Kidron valley; and the last dishonour that could be done to the idol dust was to cast it upon the graves."

"Well, what were the horses and chariots of the sun, verse 11?"

"Images," said Liph.

"No, not images; he only *took away* the horses, and burned the chariots. No; these were horses dedicated to the sun, for which it seems a stable was prepared in one of the rooms in the Temple court. There were rooms built in the courts, at the sides, for dwellings of priests and for storage of materials and articles used about the Temple. And these horses and chariots were used probably in processions; especially, as the rabbins say, in driving to meet the rising sun."

"And what was the upper chamber of Ahaz?"

"Probably built over some one or more of those rooms; perhaps in a gate-house."

"I thought Hezekiah had cleared away all the idols and altars of Ahaz?"

"Brought back by Manasseh and Amon. And so of the high places on the Mount of Corruption; they had been cleared away and restored; and now Josiah defiled the very place where they had been, 'filling their places with the bones of men.'"

"Then he went on to Bethel. But what right had he in Bethel? Josiah was not king there."

"Nor any one else. The land was in a desolate condition, filled with strangers from various parts of the empire of Assyria. Esar-haddon, in Manasseh's time, had brought the last importation. Look back at 2 Kings xvii. 24–34, and see how it was even before that. Among these foreigners there were remnants of the old ten tribes and an attempt at the worship of Jehovah. Josiah might naturally reckon himself head of all of Israel that were left; and he might further and justly look upon this matter as a purely religious one, with which the king of Assyria would not concern himself. Furthermore, the last king of Assyria seems to have made no mark upon history; and by this time the Medes may have begun to give him trouble. So Josiah was safe enough to do what his heart prompted."

"There was an Asherah in Bethel too."

"The worship of Baal and Astarte had succeeded to that of the golden calves."

"Josiah did not kill the priests of the high places in Judah," Dan remarked.

"These in Samaria were idolatrous priests. Josiah was determined to leave no idolatry in the land. All that the law bade him do he would do. So he celebrated the great passover. And it is said there was not a passover like it from the times of the judges; and its distinction lay in this obedience of every detail to the requirements of the law. Other passovers, meant truly, had left something forgotten or conformed to habit or convenience. This was point for point celebrated as it should be. You must go to Chronicles for the full account of it."

We read 2 Chron. xxxv.

"'He set the priests in their charges?'"——

"Each one according to what he had to do."

"Verse 3, Uncle Sam? I do not understand."

"Nor I, Tiny; not quite. It is explained that the Levites were not to think of the duties commanded in the law that had been read, concerning the carrying the Ark from place to place. That was over. 'Leave the Ark' or set it, mentally, 'in its place' prepared for it; and you serve the Lord and His people in the way that remains to you; in teaching the people, and in the service of the courts of the Temple. As in verses 4, 5. 'Arrange yourselves in your divisions, so that each division will be for a division of the people, to give the aid and do the work needed in the approaching passover.'"

"Oh, I understand. Then, what did they want oxen for in the passover?"

"Not in the passover proper. But the night of the passover supper was followed by a seven days' festival, during which sacrifices of burnt-offerings and peace-offerings were offered, and the people eat before the Lord. The other cattle besides the lambs and kids were used for this purpose. Read Num. xxviii. 16–25 So the paschal lamb was roasted; but the people's portion of the other sacrifices, according to the permission of the law, they boiled or stewed in water."

"What is 'removed the burnt-offerings?' verse 12."

"The portions of the sacrifices which were to be taken off and burnt on the altar, as the Lord's. Read Lev. iii. 3–11. And the singers stood in their place to sing, and the keepers of the gates stood to their posts; and in every particular all the feast was done according to the law of Moses. Turn back now to Kings xxiii. 24, and see how thorough the king was in putting away every forbidden thing out of the land."

"Yet see verse 26, Uncle Sam."

"Ay, child. Josiah saved only himself. He could not save his people. They were too deeply corrupted."

"But they joined in the covenant, and kept the passover, and agreed to everything?"

"Outwardly. Not inwardly. As Jeremiah testified."

"Did he?"

"You will see."

"Then it was all no use."

"Outward work, if alone, is never of any use."

"I am glad Josiah had peace all his days, at any rate."

"Now we have talked enough. To-morrow we will go on to Gaza. And when we get back, we will go to the place where Josiah met his death, and talk of that on the spot."

With all this delight in prospect, we slept sweetly under the shadow of the old Roman castle at Beit-jibrin. Next day we rode across the plain to Gaza.

I cannot tell the bewildering pleasure of the ride. We were passing over the Shephelah, the country of the Philistines, the region of so many struggles between them and the Israelites, and between other peoples too. We could ride pretty fast, for the ground was a plain; a sea of corn-fields; the rich, rich sea-side level which bears its harvests for tens of centuries without artificial enriching. We passed the place where Eglon once was; we took lunch where Lachish is believed to have been; and after a long day's work came in sight of the olive groves of Gaza, and saw its minarets rising up into the air. We pitched camp just at the edge of the gardens of Gaza; and after dinner we mounted to the ridge of a low range of hilly ground which divides the gardens from the plain. It is but a little distance from the city, and here we had a beautiful view and a lovely talk. The city and its groves lay before us; farther off, the downs of white sand nearer the sea; the sea itself farther off still. On the other side the immense plain, reaching off into limitless distance, and the hills of Judea framing it in. We could not satisfy ourselves with looking. Here the armies of the world's powers had passed and repassed; and here in turn they had set themselves to reduce 'the strong' city which was too important to be passed by. The central part of the town lies upon a hill, not a high one indeed; and that, Uncle Sam said, was no doubt the strong point of the ancient city. But Gaza has no walls now, and no gates."

"Isn't the place exposed to attacks, now as well as ever?" Dan asked.

"Would be, only that the inhabitants are too closely allied in interests with the marauding tribes of the desert to have anything to fear from them."

"And Egypt is not like old Egypt," said I.

"Look yonder," said my uncle, "to the south; do you see that white wavy line going southwards till it is lost to sight? That is the track of the road to Egypt; that way came and went the Pharaohs, and the Assyrians, and Nebuchadnezzar, and Cambyses, how many a time."

"But, sir," said Liph, "Zephaniah said that Gaza should be forsaken. It is here yet."

"It has been forsaken, however, for all that, and has changed its inhabitants again and again. Read the forty-seventh chapter of Jeremiah; read it aloud."

Liph obeyed.

"Pharaoh Necho subdued Gaza first. Then Cambyses possessed it. Then Alexander the Great came against it. The place was so strong and so well defended that his engines could not prevail against the walls, and his engineers confessed themselves baffled. They raised mounds of earth and planted battering-rams; but the besieged made a sally, destroyed the engines, and only Alexander in person at the head of his best troops was able to beat them back. Then the engines which had been used at the siege of Tyre were brought round; and after four or five months a breach in the walls was made. The people would not yield even then; they fought till their last man was dead; and Alexander sold the women and children into slavery. Was not Gaza 'forsaken' then? But such a place was likely always to arise from its ashes. It was destroyed again by Antiochus not very many years later. Then again in the wars of the Maccabees, when it was at least in part burnt, its inhabitants were a second time expelled from it, and the town occupied by Jews; then soon after it was by another conqueror razed to the ground. In the year 634, again, the Moslems took it; and when the crusaders came here in the

twelfth century they found the place in ruins and forsaken. How about the prophecy, Liph?"

We sat long, looking and talking, but often silent too, till the light went away, and we had to go to rest. But if I had not been very tired, I think the thoughts that filled my head would not have let me sleep.

We stayed over one day at Gaza, to see the town and its gardens, which always were lovely, I suppose, as they are now. The following day we set out again, and a ride of four hours brought us to the site of Ascalon. Arrived there, we left our horses and climbed to the top of the ridge that surrounds the place. For a sort of rampart of rocky hill runs round the whole space where the city stood, sweeping back from the sea in a bold amphitheatre, and completely enclosing a large area. Ascalon's walls were built upon this ridge. Getting to the top of some ruins, we could look over the whole tract. There are great bits of the walls overthrown, lying here and there; columns of granite and marble a great many, if one looks for them; but from where we sat we could see little except gardens. All where Ascalon was is a tract of gardens and orchards: figs, pomegranates, grapes, apples, melons, and onions. Not a dwelling or sign of habitation; and the white sand from the sea-shore drifting in and covering the wall in places, and lying here and there on the ground in a most desolate manner. Zephaniah's words are wonderfully fulfilled, and Zechariah's, ix. 5.

"How long has this ruin been so?" Dan asked.

"So late as the latter part of the seventeenth century, the walls and towers, though broken, showed evidence of their former strength. They were utterly ruined by Sultan Bibars in 1270. But the place has been uninhabited since the early part of the seventeenth century."

We rested and eat our eggs and fruit, and then rode on farther. An hour and a half, about, brought us to the site of Ashdod. There is a small hamlet of mud houses on the side of a hill. The hill is no great things, but it was once so built and fortified that it was an immensely strong place. And how beautiful it must have been! Looking over the

wide rich plain with its towns and villages, and the mountains of Judea always at the background of the picture. Ashdod has been driven out, and Ekron, the fourth of the cities mentioned by Zephaniah, "rooted up." We did not see Ekron till next day, pitching our tents at Jabneh. Early in our morning ride we came to the place. A mud village again, and nothing old except two fine wells; and this is all that is left. We rode on and got to Jerusalem that evening. Now that we were on the move, however, Uncle Sam said we would not stop; we would go straight on the next day to the plain of Esdraelon; to the battle-field where Josiah met his death. Travelling was good for me, and we would never forget the history if we studied it on the spot.

CHAPTER XX.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

Our journey to Shechem I need not describe. We took it easily, in two days; and the third day pushed on farther to Jenin. The country grows more beautiful as one goes north; that ride to Samaria is never to be forgotten. Through the rich Shechem valley first, then over the hill and down among the olive-trees, to the place of the wonderful old city. How beautiful! but we could not linger now; we went on, sometimes riding through groves of olives, sometimes vineyards and fig orchards, up and down over ridges of rocky hill, and then getting views of most delicious meadow valleys; till after several hours, coming to the top of a height, we suddenly saw the plain of Esdraelon spread out beyond us. But we were not there yet; we were standing on the mountains of Manasseh, from which long ravines go winding down to the plain; the passes of the upper country. We stood still to look, and then a couple of hours' more riding brought us to Jenin, on the borders of the great plain.

The old Hebrew city Engannim was here; the houses of to-day have no antiquity about them, but it is quite a place, and the buildings are of stone. It is beautiful; that is, the situation is beautiful; hills rising behind it, and the whole plain lying spread out before it; that wonderful plain. Fifteen miles across from Jenin to the mountains on the opposite side; and those are the mountains of Galilee, and Nazareth is just over there. Then to the right the ground rises into two great ridges running eastward; they are Mount Gilboa and Little Hermon, and between them lies the old valley of Jezreel. Of course *that* was not to be overlooked from Jenin; but we were told where it was.

Our tents were pitched here, for I could go no farther, and our talk that evening was rather scattering. So much was to be recalled, and so many Bible stories to be read, which the great plain had seen played out upon it or around it. Here went Egyptian armies and Assyrian armies; here, from Joseph's time and before, went all the caravans passing between Egypt and Damascus; the caravans passing by this northern way between Egypt and the East; they all had to cross the plain of Esdraelon to get to the plain of Jordan, and so to the lands of Gilead and Bashan beyond.

"Where did the plain get its name?" Dan asked.

"Jezreel was the Hebrew name. The Greeks called it Esdrelom. There is hardly a richer plain in the world."

"There are no villages on it, that I can see."

"It is too exposed. The Arabs come up every spring with their camels and horses, roam all over, trample the grass, cut or feed the grain, and do general destruction. Things were more or less so in the old time. The Midianites were Arabs."

"And what has this plain to do with Josiah?"

"Here he met his death. To-morrow we will look more closely at the battle-field."

So we were in our saddles early, and riding westward by the edge of the hills; so early that Gilboa and Little Hermon were still casting shadows into the plain. As we went on we had a lovely view of Tabor, and away many miles to the west rose the head of Carmel. A little more than three hours' riding brought us to a sort of recess of the hills, where we came to a stream crossed by an old bridge, and the ruins of what had been a large khan. There were two or three mills not far off, served by the waters of the stream. Some other ruins were to be found also, and wandering about, we could see columns of marble and columns of granite.

"What place is this, or was it? and why are you looking at it so long, sir?"

"This is or was, as is believed, the ancient Megiddo. Let us ride over to that high mound yonder, and I think we can get a view."

The mound was half an hour off. We rode to the top of it; and then, what a view we had! We could see the whole plain and distinguish everything. It was not green and rich now, as it would be in spring; yet we could mark varieties of colour, in stubble fields where corn had been and other patches of thistles or weeds. And we could see the valley of Jezreel in the east, stretching away; Gilboa and Tabor and Little Hermon; the hills of Galilee, the hills of Manasseh, the ridge of Carmel. We spread carpets and sat down.

"Here we are now," said Uncle Sam, "very near the battle-ground of Josiah's last fight. There was Megiddo; here, running past us down in the plain, are the 'waters of Megiddo.' There, just by Megiddo, comes out the caravan route from Egypt; that old khan was for the convenience of travellers. The road comes by Gaza, where you saw it, to Ramleh in the plain, then through the hills here to Megiddo, and strikes across the plain to the corner of Little Hermon yonder; then round the foot of Mount Tabor and up to the lake of Genesareth. But the old route crossed the Jordan below the lake. Here came Pharaoh Necho with his army, on his way to the Euphrates to dispute sovereignty with Assyria. Unless, as some think, he sent his great army in ships to the port of Acre there, beyond the farther end of Mount Carmel, and marched into the plain by the narrow pass between Carmel and the opposite hills. But for my part I believe Pharaoh came by the old road which all his predecessors had followed, up along the sea-side plain."

"Why did not Josiah catch him there, then? It was nearer."

"Perhaps he disliked the neighbourhood of the Philistine cities, which would have helped Pharaoh, and not him. Perhaps he could not intercept the Egyptian march at any convenient point short of this. I do not know. Only, here they met."

"Uncle Sam, why did Josiah put himself in the way at all? Pharaoh did not want to meddle with him. See 2 Chron. xxxv. 21."

"That was all very well to say; but Josiah knew it meant nothing. No power that ruled the west of Asia would leave Judea and Jerusalem out of its calculations. Neutrality was impossible. For the moment, certainly, Necho did not want to turn aside or be stopped for him."

"Josiah might have waited, I think."

"It is difficult, we have so few details, to tell exactly the state of circumstances. But some things are pretty certain. There had been lately an invasion of Western Asia by the Scythians, a horde of barbarians from beyond the Caucasus. They came in enormous numbers, untrained, savage, wild; like the hosts that in later times poured out from the north of Europe and ravaged the south. They swept over all Western Asia like a great tidal wave, ravaging, plundering, and burning. Their force seems to have been expended or their greed glutted before they got so far as Palestine and Philistia; for though some of them went down towards Egypt, Psammetichus bought them off, and they did no mischief in those quarters. And soon they were driven out of Asia again. However, it seems likely that they had greatly paralysed Assyria during their invasion, and left it broken and weakened. It seems that the Medes, on Assyria's borders, recovered first from the common disaster, and saw and seized their opportunity to fall upon their great neighbour. At the same time the Susianians attacked her in the south. The last king of Nineveh sent one of his generals, Nabopolassar, with a force, into the south to meet the invaders there, while he himself wrestled with the Medes. But Nabopolassar took his advantage, made alliance with the Medes and a match between the king's daughter and his own son Nebuchadnezzar; and both nations, Babylonia and Media, turned upon Assyria. The exact date of Nineveh's fall is not known; but it seems that before the time of Necho's march these changes must have been going on. Probably Nineveh had fallen, and the rule of Babylon had replaced that of Assyria in all lands west of the Euphrates. In any case, Josiah held the place of a vassal to the great central power. It is not said in the Bible, I know, Dan;

but see. It is not conceivable that Esar-haddon should have released and reinstated Manasseh on any other terms; and as little that during all the years following, when Assyria laid a crushing hand on every revolt that raised its head anywhere, she should have allowed Judah alone to assert her independence. No, Judah was quiet because loyal; and holding to the loyal policy which he had found to be good, I think Josiah met and tried to stay the march of Pharaoh Necho. Don't you see, if he had not, he might have been reckoned an accomplice of Necho, and so suffered, as Hezekiah had done before for taking part against Sennacherib? Whether the actual ruler just now were Saracus or Nabopolassar, it made no difference. Josiah had no reason to think that Necho would succeed; as he did not, or only for a little time."

"And so Josiah was killed!"

"In mercy to him. The evil day was coming near now, which it had been promised he should not see."

"In Chronicles it says, 'They brought him to Jerusalem and he died'; but in Kings, 'They carried him dead from Megiddo'?"

"The first is the general statement. The good king was hit by the Egyptian archers; his servants removed him from his war chariot into the second waiting chariot, in which, I suppose, he could sit or recline; and apparently he died very soon; for there was a great lamentation for him at a place not far off called Hadad-rimmon. Zechariah likens the anguish of the Jews when they shall recognise their Messiah and what they have done to Him, to that mourning in the valley of Megiddo; as if it were one of the sorest the nation had ever known. See Zech. xii. 11."

"But, Uncle Sam, Pharaoh told Josiah that the Lord had sent him."

"Not the Lord Jehovah, but God the Creator. That was Pharaoh's say so. Sennacherib pretended the same thing. Josiah would not listen. We cannot suppose that the Lord sent a prophet to Necho to tell *him* a message to Josiah. If Jeremiah had brought it, that would have been another thing."

We sat still and looked and listened. There was hardly a sound abroad. A breeze stirred softly, some griffon vultures were circling about in the air; scarce anything else was moving. The armies and their conflicts had so long passed away.

"Uncle Sam," I said suddenly and not very wisely, "do you think there will ever be battles here again?"

"Probably. There has been many a fight here, Tiny, since Josiah's day. At any rate, we are told in the Revelation, chap. xvi., that the kings of the world will be gathered together by devilish working to fight against God, and that the battle place will be Armageddon; which is, the mountain of Megiddo."

"Do you suppose it will be *here?*"

"It says it will."

"But the kings of the world could not all get here."

"Well, their allied forces might. Anyhow, this plain was the great battle-place of the nations known to Hebrew history."

We spent another night at Jenin, and then took our way south again. At Bethel we turned out of the road to see the spot where Josiah threw down altars and pillars and burned bones out of the sepulchres to pollute the place. It was bare and desolate and lonely, lying still in the sunshine, as if men had never sought to it for any purpose. And yet Abraham's altar had been there, and Jeroboam's golden calf, and courts had gathered on those rocky hills, and people streamed thither to sacrifice; until the day when Josiah burned bones upon the place, and it was left solitary and empty. We lingered, and I would have liked to linger yet longer, looking and thinking.

The next day we got home, I mean, to the Mount of Olives; and took up the course of our history the same evening. And still oftener now than previously, at every step of the story, our eyes went over to the heights of Jerusalem where the things had once been done of which we were talking. Not those walls, nor those houses in sight, had heard Jeremiah's preaching, or borne the attack of Nebuchad-

nezzar's army; and even the valleys had been greatly filled up since then with ruins and rubbish of the destroyed city. Yet it was Jerusalem, and the Temple area was where the Mosque of Omar stands now, and the surrounding hills were the same; and it was *there* it had all happened.

"Before we go on with Jehoahaz," Uncle Sam said, "we must look at what Jeremiah had been doing. Ever since the thirteenth year of Josiah he had been preaching."

"What for?" said Liph.

"What for? why, because the Lord sent him. Sent him to rebuke the people for their misdeeds and to warn them to repent, and to promise to the repentant the loving-kindness of the Lord. None of the prophets had a tenderer message of love to bring than Jeremiah had."

"But in Isaiah's time, you said, the people were past help, and the judgment must come."

"The nation, yes. Nevertheless, there was to be a remnant saved and blessed; every one who would might belong to that remnant; and so Jeremiah cried his message. Josiah laboured to reform the people externally; and the prophet preached, that as far as possible the reform might go down into hearts, and as many as possible be saved. It shows the tender mercy of the Lord most wonderfully. Now, children, find the second chapter of Jeremiah and read the first thirteen verses, and then from verse 26 to the end."

"When was the time described in verses 2, 3?" Dan asked.

"When the people followed obediently and trustingly, though they feared and murmured at times, after they left Egypt till they came to Sinai. There the covenant was solemnised between God and the people; and then they began to break the covenant, almost as soon as made."

"Why should they be 'ashamed of Egypt'?"

"Of their trust in Egypt. Once they had sought to Assyria for help, in the time of Ahaz; now the temptation was to seek help from Egypt against Assyria; and all would be vain. *All* trust, other than in the Lord, would end

in disappointment. 'Hands upon the head' was the gesture of one in the most abject mourning. Now read from verse 19 of chapter iv."

"What are their 'lovers,' Uncle Sam, in verse 30?"

"The false gods and the earthly powers in whom Judah trusted; to whom she had recourse in her trouble. The covenant between God and His people is likened to the marriage covenant; and Judah was acting like a woman who forsakes the husband that loves her and would protect her, and seeks other friends and commits herself to their care. Ruin and disgrace must be the end of it."

"'Destruction upon destruction'—'every city shall be forsaken'"—said Dan reading.

"We shall see how that came true. Again and again Nebuchadnezzar's armies swept over and did their work. Read next in the fifth chapter, verses 1–6, and 20–31."

"This shows certainly that all Josiah's reforms did not go deep. They 'made their faces harder than a rock'; that is obstinacy!"

"And false prophets became the fashion, and the people 'loved to have it so'; and the case becomes pretty desperate then. Read still further chap. vi. 6–17, and the whole of chap. vii. And then see in chap. viii. 18–22, the prophet's own grief at what he had to tell."

"Uncle Sam, what is the sense of that question, 'Is there no balm in Gilead'?"

"Because there was such a plenty of balm in Gilead; and there was such a plenty of forgiving love and tender compassion in God. 'Why, then, is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?' Alas, it is a cry which might have been often repeated since then!"

"Here is more about it in the ninth chapter,' said Dan. "Just read the first eight verses."

"And now look at Jeremiah's declarations of the coming judgment. See chap. v. 15–19, and vi. 22–25; and see too Moses' prophecy, Deut. xxviii. 49–52."

"What nation was this?"

"The nation that came, the Chaldæans. But notice, that

in this earlier part of Jeremiah's preaching the Chaldæans were not an independent nation. Assyria held them and all the known lands of the world in her power; and no human foresight could see it likely that Chaldæa would suddenly become the mistress of the nations, and Assyria go down."

"But the Chaldæans did not come from the north, sir?"

"Always. It was the only way they could come with armies. Up the course of the Euphrates, across the desert where it is narrow, and down either through Cœle-Syria, or by Damascus to the Jordan, and across the plain of Esdraelon."

"Some people think it was the Scythians, sir."

"There is no notice in history that the Scythians ever did any damage to Palestine. And certainly the Jews were never prisoners in the land of the Scythians. Read chap. ix. 9–22; x. 17–22. You see there the foretelling of the captivity. 'My children are gone forth of me and are not!' Then see chap. xiii. 15–21; xv. 1–9."

"If the people liked false prophets, I should think they would not have liked Jeremiah."

"Far from it. In fact, he had a great deal of trouble, apart from the sorrow and sympathy he felt, and which almost broke his heart. The men of Anathoth, his own native city, charged him to stop prophesying or they would put a violent end to it; they laid plots to destroy him, and openly threatened him. In Jerusalem he was withstood and defamed, and there also plots laid against him; but the Lord had made him 'an iron pillar and brazen walls against the whole land;' he stood immovable."

"Uncle Sam, those old prophets had a hard time?"

"So Stephen reminded the Jews, when on his trial. 'Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of that Just One.'"

"I wonder the Lord did not give up the people entirely."

"And yet He sent the tenderest messages to them, and promises of what He would do for the 'remnant' who would

turn to Him. See iii. 4, and verses 11–23 of the same chapter. And iv. 1, 2, and vii. 1–7. But all would not do. Josiah reformed the worship, and cleansed the city and the land, and celebrated the passover; and Jeremiah warned and threatened and invited, if some might be saved from the wreck which was coming. Meanwhile in Media and Assyria and Babylonia the Lord's preparations were slowly and surely making. Then one day Jeremiah, according to orders received, gathered a company of nobles, of the laity and of the priests, some of those who stood highest in the city, and holding an earthen bottle in his hand, led them forth by one of the two southern gates which led into the valley of Hinnom; and when he had got them there, he delivered a message to them; and then dashed the bottle to pieces before their eyes. As much as to say, that Jerusalem's ruin was certain and irreparable, even as the broken pieces could not be put together again. Read his speech to the princes in chap. xix. 3–13. You can imagine the dark looks cast upon him and the scowling brows. But Jeremiah went up from the valley where he had broken the bottle, and took his stand in the court of the Temple, and cried to all the people within hearing, 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks that they might not hear My words.'"

"He got put in the stocks for that day's work," said Liph. "What sort of stocks were those?"

"It was a torturing sort of frame-work, which confined the person in a forced, unnatural position, from which, of course, he could not move himself. That was a sore night to Jeremiah, mentally as well as physically. His courage gave out; he wished he had never been born. But he recovered from that condition."

"Who was Pashur?"

"The chief ruler of the Temple; an officer very high in authority. It seems by 2 Chron. xxxv. 8, that there were several such rulers or governors. You see further by verse

6, that Pashur was one of the false prophets whose lies encouraged the people in rebellion. And now I believe we may go back to the history in 2 Kings xxiii. 31. When the dead body of Josiah was brought to Jerusalem, the people of the land made his son Jehoahaz king in his room. Why they chose him instead of his elder brother Eliakim, I cannot tell. Perhaps Eliakim was known to favour the Egyptianising party; perhaps there were other reasons. Neither of them was a good man."

"If Eliakim was of his party, that might have been why Necho set him up."

"It is not necessary to suppose that Jehoahaz was made king without Necho's pleasure; that was enough. It would never do for Pharaoh to leave the kingdom under any but a vassal approved and subject to him. He was going on to the Euphrates, to fight for his own independence and dominion in Western Asia; he must leave things safe in Judah."

"In Chronicles xxxvi. 3, it says the king of Egypt deposed Jehoahaz 'at Jerusalem'; in Kings here it says he put him in fetters at Riblah?"

"What discrepancy is there? Pharaoh let his army proceed up the valley between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, we may suppose, and sent a detachment to Jerusalem to order things in that city. This force deposed Jehoahaz, and brought him to Riblah, where the Egyptian king was holding his headquarters."

"Then where is Riblah?"

"Open your maps. Follow up the valley of Cœle-Syria, or Hollow Syria, as the moderns called it, to a bend in the river Orontes, where from an east it takes a northerly direction. There, just at the bend, was Riblah. It is first mentioned as lying on the eastern border of the promised land. Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar could have no better place for the camp or the march of a large army. On all sides but the south-east spreads a vast rich plain, giving plenty of food and forage, and abundantly supplied with water. From here the Egyptian might go by Aleppo across

the desert to the Euphrates and Nineveh, or he might take a more southerly route by Palmyra. Or the Assyrian or the Babylonian king would here be on the high road to Palestine and Egypt. He could follow the great valley-plain down to the southern end of Anti-Lebanon and the Jordan valley, or down the coast on the other side of Lebanon. Here Necho was waiting, and hither Jehoahaz was brought to him."

"And put in chains."

"And sent to Egypt. The land also was put under tribute; and Eliakim raised to the throne, with the name of Jehoiakim. 'Jehovah will set up.'"

"Who could have chosen such a name for him?"

"Himself perhaps, in defiance of Jeremiah."

"Why should his name be changed anyhow?"

"That was a mark of ownership. Masters gave new names to their servants, and princes to their dependents. See Gen. xli. 45, and Dan. i. 7. And then, Is. lxii. 2—John i. 42—Rev. iii. 12."

"What became of Jehoahaz?"

"He died in Egypt. Look at Jeremiah's words about him—chap. xxii. 10-12. The people were mourning for the good Josiah. But the prophet said, 'Weep not for him, but for his son rather.' Better to die than to be an exile in a strange land, and never come home any more."

"I don't think so," said Priscilla. "Then, did Pharaoh go on to fight with Assyria?"

"It did not come to a pitched battle for several years. Pharaoh seems to have taken all he wanted, from the Euphrates westward; and after settling things in Judah he besieged Gaza and took it. The king of Babylon, Nabopolassar, was an old man; not very enterprising; and for three years Pharaoh enjoyed his conquests. Then, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, Nabopolassar sent his son Nebuchadnezzar with a great army to punish the invader and restore his own rule. The armies met at Carchemish, a place on the Euphrates, whither Necho had gathered an

enormous force. Read the 46th chapter of Jeremiah 1–12; there he gives the liveliest description of the battle, as if it were before his eyes."

"This was written after the battle, sir."

"No, before."

"Look at the second verse."

"That is merely the heading prefixed to the prophecy when later it was written down. You may see in verses 6 and 10 the use of the future tense."

"'Egypt riseth up like a flood'—that must have been a great army."

"Like the Nile when it overflowed all the land."

"But were the Egyptians the enemies of the Lord?"

"Had they not oppressed and injured His people? No one does that with lasting impunity. Necho was defeated at Carchemish with a great defeat, and never could recover his standing. Nebuchadnezzar gathered up into his hand all the lost power; see 2 Kings xxiv. 7. But his turn was to come. Look now at Jer. xxv. 1–29. Here we have the prophet's announcement first of what Nebuchadnezzar would do to Judah and all the nations; next, the term of the Jews' captivity; and then, after detailing the punishment that should come upon all the other nations, through him, the destruction that should finally fall on the king of Sheshach, that is, Babylon himself."

"Here are all the kingdoms of the earth specified," said Liph. "They were not all of them oppressors of Judah, however."

"Stop a bit; they were all helping and following the king of Babylon, save Egypt, and the princes who had helped *him*, Egypt, Philistia and Phœnicia, Edom, Moab and Ammon, the Arabians of the desert; not 'in the utmost corners,' as verse 23 renders it, but 'with the corners of their hair polled.' Herodotus relates, that the Arabians cut away their hair in a ring from their temples, and that in doing so they say they follow their god Arotal. Wherefore the Hebrews were forbidden to cut their hair in that fashion. See Lev. xix. 27. Zimri is not known with cer-

"No manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God."

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tainty, Elam and Media and the 'kings of the north,' make up the tale."

"Uncle Sam, I remember the promise to Abraham, 'I will bless him that blesseth thee, and will curse him that curseth thee.'"

"Always true, Prissy; and the promise passes over, with all the rest of the promises, to Christ and His Church. 'The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish.' This destruction announced here upon the great world power, is the type and earnest of what shall be when the Lord takes His own. Meanwhile, we must go on with our history. Nebuchadnezzar, not knowing that he was fulfilling the Lord's purposes, defeated Necho at Carchemish, swept on and came to Jerusalem, where Jehoiakim made peace with him and became his vassal; went on to the borders of Egypt, and there was stopped by hearing of the death of his father. Fearing then troubles at home, he let his army return by the usual way, while he himself made a forced march across the desert to Babylon. Now, children, turn to the first chapter of Daniel, and read the first seven verses."

"Why, according to this, sir, Nebuchadnezzar came in the *third* year of Jehoiakim."

"Probably Nebuchadnezzar's expedition fell in both years; was begun in the third, and brought him to Jerusalem in the fourth. But see, children, here began the going into captivity. Some of the choicest and noblest of Judah's noble blood went to be servants of Nebuchadnezzar in his great eastern capital."

"Part of the Temple furniture too," said Dan.

"Furthermore, from 2 Chron. xxxvi. 6, we learn that Jehoiakim was at first put in chains to be likewise carried away; but upon his submission he was restored as Nebuchadnezzar's vassal."

"I wonder how the people felt now?"

"We have records to shew. Read the 26th chapter of Jeremiah."

"Who was this Uriah?"

"One of the Lord's faithful martyrs and witnesses; that is all we know about him.

"But, sir," said Liph, "the destruction was coming upon the city and could not be helped; what did the prophets want with their preaching?"

"What prophets want nowadays with their preaching,—to save some. And it is hard work!" added Uncle Sam sighing.

"Who was this Ahikam? didn't we hear of him before?"

"He was one of the commission sent by Josiah to inquire of Huldah the prophetess. But now look at another bit of history. Find Jer. xxxvi. and read it. This happened in the same year of Jehoiakim in which Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem the first time."

We read a few verses, and then Dan inquired if this was any particular fast-day?

"A very particular one, for it was ordered by the king. Only one fast-day was appointed by the law, and that was in the seventh month, about October. This was in December."

"It is odd, though, that such a bad king should appoint a fast-day. Was he frightened at last?"

"I should think it must have been before Nebuchadnezzar came," said Liph.

"*That* would have been unlike Jehoiakim. No, it was no fast of real humiliation and repentance. It was held in Jehoiakim's fifth year—a year after the Chaldees had come; and it is believed to have been a fast in memory of that first taking of the city and on the anniversary of the day. The king's object was rather to get the minds of the people inflamed against the Chaldæans, so to stir them up to join with him in seeking alliance with Egypt and throwing off the Babylonian yoke. Therefore, now again, Jeremiah protested to the people in the name of the Lord. If they revolted from Nebuchadnezzar they prepared for themselves only certain destruction."

"But what was in the roll that Baruch wrote and read to the people?"

"See verse 2. The substance of what Jeremiah had been preaching to them for over twenty years; what we have been reading in different chapters. The first twenty chapters of the book of Jeremiah give it to us; though even the first roll written by Baruch contained more than this. Jeremiah, you see, was working directly against the king's purpose; he had told the people before, that the Chaldæans would take the city and lay waste the land; and nobody would believe or hearken. Now the beginning of the fulfilment had come; and smarting and trembling under this first infliction the people, he hoped, might listen and seek the Lord. At any rate, his warning would lie against anything so self-ruinous as a rebellion under Nebuchadnezzar. So Baruch, as Jeremiah was hindered, took the roll to the assembled multitude in the Temple, and read such portions as he judged fittest to make the desired impression."

"What hindered Jeremiah?"

"Probably in prison."

"Well, some people were frightened this time," said Dan.

"Gemariah, in verse 10, it is likely, was a brother of Ahikam. He was a private secretary of the king, and like his brother probably friendly to Jeremiah. His son carried word of what was going on to the office of Elishama, the state secretary. The princes assembled there sent for Baruch, and when they heard his reading, 'they were afraid one at another.' Things took a new face, now that the king was actually a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar, and the best of Jewish blood were hostages in Babylon."

"Jehoiakim did not care."

"He cared just to throw off the yoke of Babylon."

"Then he would have just put on the yoke of Egypt."

"He did not see that."

"He was a daring, bad man," said Priscilla. "He burnt the Lord's words."

"There was a brazier with coals standing before him; not a fire on a hearth, Tiny; the brazier was the best the

king had; and into that he threw the bits of the roll as he cut them; not regarding the petitions of the princes, who begged he would not."

"There came a heavy punishment upon him for it."

"But, sir," said Liph, "his son did reign after him."

"For how long? A space of three months does not say anything against the prophecy."

"I suppose the king would have killed Jeremiah if he could," said Priscilla; "only the Lord hid him."

"Jeremiah's work was not done," said my uncle.

CHAPTER XXI.

ZEDEKIAH.

"WE are almost at the end now," said I. "Uncle Sam, it seems from 2 Kings xxiv. that Jehoiakim did rebel at the end of three years; two years after he cut the roll up. Then, how is verse 2? Did the Chaldees destroy Judah that time? I thought Jehoiakim reigned eleven years."

"He did. The Chaldees did not at once come. Just at that time Phœnicia also rebelled against Babylon; Nebuchadnezzar went first against Tyre. His army is said to have been immense; ten thousand chariots were with him, and one hundred and twenty thousand horse, and infantry in proportion. He went against Tyre; but Tyre was a strong place and not to be taken at a blow. So he left a portion of his army there to carry on the siege, and with bands of his forces, drawn from different tributaries, came on himself to Jerusalem. There was no siege this time; Jehoiakim submitted; for you see in Kings xxiv. 7, that his hope of help from Egypt was vain. Nebuchadnezzar denied him burial, but put his son Jehoiachin in his place. Now read Ezekiel xix. 1–9 for a description of two of these last princes of Judah."

"What a description!" said Priscilla. "The lioness is the kingdom of Judah?"

"The Jewish nation or people, rather."

"And the first young lion was Shallum; he 'devoured men.' The second is Jehoiakim?"

"Jehoiakim was slain and 'buried with the burial of an ass'; this is his son Jehoiachin. He too 'devoured men,' and 'the land was desolate by the noise of his roaring.' He was a very bad man. See Jer. xxii. 24–28 for what the Lord says of him."

"Uncle Sam, it does not say that Nebuchadnezzar denied burial to Jehoiakim. In Chronicles xxxvi. 6, it says he bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon."

"My dear, both statements must be true. That occurred most likely on the former occasion. It is not said, you observe, that he was carried to Babylon. The Babylonians were a cruel people, and it may be that after his officers had taken Jehoiakim prisoner, Nebuchadnezzar, in stern revenge for his disloyalty, sentenced him to death and degradation. Then his son Jehoiachin rebelled also, or was suspected of rebellious designs; or else the 'at that time' in 2 Kings xxiv. 10, begins before the death of Jehoiakim, and covers all the little space of Jehoiachin's reign, during which the city was besieged. The story is so briefly given that it is impossible to arrange all the details. At last, Jehoiachin, despairing of making good his defence, went out to the king of Babylon and gave himself up; he and his family and principal officers. This time Nebuchadnezzar came into the city, and took away all that was worth taking. On the former occasion, seven years before, all the smaller golden vessels of the Temple had been carried off; the bowls and shovels and goblets, tongs, &c. Now he had the plates of gold stripped from the altar of incense, the table of shewbread and the ark of the covenant; so that little was left beside the great brazen vessels. And now Nebuchadnezzar carried off from Jerusalem all its best people; the nobles, the captains and men of means; of these seven thousand; then of the best craftsmen and mechanics a thousand. Nothing was left but the lower classes of the people; the best and the wisest and the strongest were taken away. Ezekiel was one of them. The officers of the court and heads of government made up the rest of the ten thousand carried to Babylon. And Josiah's youngest son, Mattaniah, was left to govern what remained of the thinned and humbled and crushed nation. His name changed to a very pious one,—'He who has Jehovah's righteousness.'"

"Who chose that name for him?"

"Not Nebuchadnezzar, who knew little of Jehovah or His

righteousness. It must have been Mattaniah himself probably."

"But what did *he* know of Jehovah's righteousness?"

"Not much. Maybe, only that it was promised to the land, and deliverance with it, and Mattaniah would put in a claim. But he neither loved nor trusted nor obeyed the Lord. Read 2 Chron. xxxvi. 11–16, and 2 Kings xxiv. 18–20."

"Uncle Sam, how was it 'through the anger of the Lord that it came to pass'?"

"The nation, as a nation, had sinned past forgiveness. Zedekiah was wicked like his predecessors, so the Lord allowed him to be tempted to revolt against Nebuchadnezzar in order that utter destruction might come upon the city and the land and the people. Read next Jer. xxiv. There is a promise of the return of the remnant which should seek the Lord. Now see the letter which Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Babylon. Jer. xxix. 1–19."

"Why were these ambassadors sent to Babylon?"

"We have no knowledge of that. But see. The prophet bids the people submit peaceably to the will of the Lord; to behave like good citizens in their foreign home; and wait till the promised time comes when He will bring them back to their own country. And he bids them beware of the false prophets who tell them what they would like to hear, but what is not true. False prophets were busy in Babylon, even as they were still in Jerusalem; busy to do mischief; stirring up men's minds to hope for success in revolt. Read Jer. xxviii. for a sample, that you may know what influences were at work upon Zedekiah and the people, and what sort of thing Jeremiah had to fight against; and you can understand how the men who listened to these false prophets hated *him*."

"But I do not understand why it was wrong for Zedekiah to rebel. Why not be independent, if he could?"

"The Lord had declared it to be His will that the people should be under the power of Babylon, until the fixed time. To rebel against Nebuchadnezzar therefore was to rebel

against *Him*. See 2 Chron. xxxvi. 13. You find that Zedekiah had sworn a solemn oath of allegiance. Now, children, turn to the 17th chapter of Ezekiel and read."

We read ten verses, and then demanded to know the meaning. Who was this first eagle? and who the second? what was the cedar-tree, and the vine "of low stature"?

"Read on, and you will see. The cedar is the house of Judah. The first great eagle was Nebuchadnezzar, who had taken 'the top of his young twigs,' the strength and vigour of the tree, and carried it and set it elsewhere. The 'vine of low stature' is the people left in the land, common and feeble, but still in condition to live and grow so long as its roots were 'under him.' But the vine bent her roots in another direction, even towards the power of Egypt, and so disappointed the purpose of mercy which had left it and planted it in the land. Read on. You will see that the Lord reckoned the oath *His* oath, which Zedekiah had sworn and had broken."

We read the chapter through; and then I asked the meaning of the last verses. "What is this 'highest branch of the high cedar'?"

"Ah, Tiny, don't you know? Look at the 11th chapter of Isaiah."

"Oh, is it *that?*" I cried. "It is Christ and His kingdom! I think that is a most beautiful chapter of Ezekiel, Uncle Sam."

"And this one of Isaiah," added Prissy.

"How gracious," said Dan. "Such a promise of good, following so close upon such behaviour of the people."

"The like often recurs in the addresses of Jeremiah, and the other prophets too. Next, children, read Jeremiah's warning to the king not to revolt, Jer. xxvii. 12–22. And in the next chapter you have read of the work of the false prophets, giving delusive hopes, prophesying what would please the ears of king and people."

"Was Zedekiah just as bad as his brothers had been?"

"Just as disobedient. He seems to have been a weaker man and open to fear, but with no will or strength to do good.

So when he had been king eight years, he rebelled against the king of Babylon; hoping for help from Egypt, which had again a king of some vigour, Pharaoh Hophra, or Apries. And in Zedekiah's ninth year, Nebuchadnezzar came against him with his whole force. This was the fourth time the little kingdom of Judah had given him trouble; twice under Jehoiakim, once under Jehoiachin, if that indeed were a distinct effort from the former, and now under Zedekiah. It was not to happen again. See Jer. xxxiv. 1. The king of Babylon came with 'all the kingdoms of the earth of his dominion;' took all the fortified places, swept the land, invested Lachish and Azekah, the only ones left; and sat down before Jerusalem, gathering his enormous forces round about her on these hills and valleys. Remember Jer. i. 14, 15. They built towers against the city; shut it up so that none could go out or come in, and so went into a formal siege; for the place was too strong to be taken by storm. There was many a varied nationality to be seen here then; camps of different dress and armour and standards; but Jerusalem was compassed by a swarm that had one fixed purpose, for they all did the will of one man; and that will now was vengeance."

"Uncle Sam, what do you think would have happened if Zedekiah and the people had repented now?"

"I never heard of anybody repenting in vain, Tiny, if you mean honest repentance. But Zedekiah and the people had no thought of such a thing."

"Did they think they could defend themselves successfully?"

"They looked for help from Egypt. You need not wonder, children. It is precisely the way men do at this day. The Lord Himself is the last resort of people in trouble. They will try everything else first."

"Isn't it right to try to help one's self, sir?" asked Liph.

"Certainly. There is a choice of ways, however."

"I do not understand you, sir."

"I mean only, that there is one way in which the Lord will give *His* help; in the others He will not. As for

Zedekiah he did get frightened, and sent messengers to Jeremiah to ask whether there was any hope that the Lord would work a wonder for them, so that the Chaldæans might 'go up' from the city; raise the siege; as in the case of Sennacherib. See Jer. xxi."

"In verse 4, the Lord says He will 'turn back' the weapons in the hands of the people—how?"

"The investment of the city was not yet completed. The people were endeavouring still to fight the enemy 'without the walls'—for so the words mean. The Lord would beat back their efforts and oblige the warriors to retreat within the city walls."

"But in the 12th verse, sir, the words read as if there were still room left for repentance?"

"Who doubts it? The city might have been saved, even then, at least for that time, from utter destruction, if the people would have listened. Come back to Jer. xxxiv. It seems from the record here, that Zedekiah and the people in their trouble did set up a sort of incipient reform. It was contrary to law to keep a Hebrew man or woman in slavery longer than six years; in the seventh he was to go free. See the law, Deut. xv. 12. Now the king had made a very solemn covenant with all the people that they would let their Hebrew slaves go free accordingly. They swore it, and they killed a young bullock, and the parties passed between the halves of the carcass cut and laid opposite to one another. They swore it, and let their slaves go free; and afterwards repented the wrong way and took them back again."

"I should not think they would be taken back."

"It was not a reign of justice, but of power and violence in those days."

"What did they perform that strange ceremony for?"

"Passing between the halves of the bullock? It was a very ancient custom, in use among many nations. I always think that was referred to in the old Jewish oath, 'God do so to me, and more also'—if I do not keep my word, that is, about something."

"I think this one transaction shews that the people were hopelessly bad," said Dan.

"We have run a little ahead of our story. It took place, this transaction, a little while later. Notice the 21st verse. 'Zedekiah and his princes will I give . . . into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, *which are gone up from you.*' It was a moment of hope. Pharaoh Hophra had advanced from Egypt with an army; and the Chaldæans had raised the siege to go to meet him. Hophra was a young king, just come to the crown, spirited enough to undertake so daring a scheme. Zedekiah had applied to him for men and horses, Ezek. xvii. 15, to help break the yoke of Babylon, and Hophra had come into the plan. Now with a large army he had marched up to help his ally, and the Chaldæans were for the moment withdrawn from Jerusalem. I suppose the Hebrew slaves had been set free at an earlier time, when fear forced so much concession from their masters; and now, when the princes and nobles took breath again, they took back their servants also. It was just now that Zedekiah sent another message to Jeremiah. The time was critical; all depended on Pharaoh's winning a battle; Zedekiah sent word to the prophet, 'Pray now unto the Lord our God for us.'" Jer. xxxvii. 3.

"It is strange *he*, such a man as he, should say, 'the Lord *our* God.'"

"My dear, evil men and disobedient men are quite apt to like to use that deception upon themselves. Jeremiah's answer is in verses 6–10. It was presently after this that Jeremiah, purposing to go home to Anathoth for some private business, was stopped at the city gate. Verse 12 does not read right in our version. He did not intend to 'separate himself thence;' it should read rather, 'to bring thence his portion.' Anyhow at the gate of Benjamin, or of Ephraim, the gate leading out upon the great northern road, the captain of the watch stopped him, and charged him with deserting to the Chaldæans. The Chaldæans were not before the city then, and Jeremiah denied the

charge; but men remembered no doubt, and resented what he had said on a former occasion or occasions, xxi. 9, and the guard arrested him and took him to some of the chief officers of the city. And so began Jeremiah's imprisonment; a fearful imprisonment it must have been. Those underground pits of prisons in the old time, opening by only a trap-door to the world above, dark, damp, noisome, filthy, with never a sun ray or a breath of pure air, must have been dreadful exceedingly."

"And Jeremiah was so good, Uncle Sam. How could it happen?"

"My dear, the Lord's soldiers must fight. And in earthly warfare it is never reckoned a dishonour, nor on the whole a disadvantage, to be sent on the most dangerous and difficult pieces of service. In the end it turns to 'glory, honour, and immortality.' Jeremiah don't mind it now."

"He stayed in the prison 'many days,'" said I, reading the sixteenth verse.

"That means a good long time. Meanwhile Pharaoh was gone back to Egypt, as it would seem, without fighting, though Josephus reports a battle; but at any rate he was gone home; the Chaldæans had come back and renewed the siege, and were pressing it hard. Then the weak king's fears and perhaps his conscience got the better of his pride, and he secretly sent for Jeremiah to see if he could get any word of hope from him. I think I can see the two figures. The king as yet well kept and cared for; the prophet worn, haggard, soiled, neglected in dress and person, showing the traces of his cruel prison life. But upright, unbending, faithful as ever. Read from verse 16 to end of chapter."

"What sort of a place was he put in now?"

"The 'court of the prison' is the same as the court of the watch; and that was in the king's palace; what was called the fore court. You know, houses, great and small, were built round an open court; and great houses round more than one. The court of the watch, therefore, was the

first court; the inner one was the most private and sacred from intrusion; and in a building opening out of the first court, was, it seems, a place of imprisonment.'

"They were getting short of bread, I should think, by the king's words. Did all the bakers live in one street?"

"That is oriental fashion. In a great bazaar, like that at Smyrna, which I have often visited, there are whole streets of one sort of shop; a street of shoemakers, and nothing else; a street of mercers' shops; a street of saddlers; and so on."

"I should think Zedekiah might have set Jeremiah at liberty. He knew he had done nothing wrong."

"His doctrine was disagreeable."

"Was that enough?"

"Quite enough for an eastern despot, or for a weak bad man like Zedekiah. See chap. xxxii. 3–5 for a fuller report. Now, before we go on to the end of the siege, let us look at the beauty of the promise that even now God sent to His servant and through him to all believers. In spite of the extremity in which they were, in spite of the destruction that was coming, the Lord promised restoration and blessing by and by. First Jeremiah received intimation from the Lord, that he would have a visit from an uncle of his, who would come to get him to redeem a property in Anathoth which he had been obliged to sell. You remember the law of redemption? It is in Lev. xxv. 25. Soon after, accordingly, came Hanameel, the uncle in question, with the above demand. Read now, children, Jer. xxxii. 6–44."

"How lovely!" said I.

"But has this promise ever been fulfilled?" said Liph.

"Yes, and no. It is like other prophecies, double. It was fulfilled presently, at the end of the seventy years, when the Lord brought the remnant back from the captivity, and planted them again in the land, and built the city, and blessed them. Neither did the people of the Jews ever go back to idolatry any more. From that day to this, idols have been their special horror. They were cured of that. Yet you see and feel that the terms of the prophecy reach further and take in more; for that 'everlasting covenant'

is the same as the 'new covenant' which Jesus said was 'in His blood'—see Luke xxii. 20, and which runs, 'He that believeth in Me hath everlasting life.' If you go on and read the next chapter, you will see still more plainly, that under the promise of return from the captivity, the Lord comprehends and paints the deliverance from a worse thraldom. For it is the time of the 'Branch of Righteousness'; that is, of the Messiah; that is, of Christ; and 'in His days' it shall be that 'Judah shall be saved and Jerusalem shall dwell safely.'"

"The real Jerusalem? or the other?"

"Both, child; one is the figure of the other. But it is the people anyhow whose name is 'The Lord our Righteousness.' That describes them. And the literal coming home and deliverance of the Jews at the end of the captivity, was a type and a promise and an earnest of their salvation and triumph by and by under the Lord their Redeemer, and of their coming to take possession of the inheritance He has bought back for them. But I am running away from our story and beyond your understanding. Let us return to Jeremiah in the court of the prison. Here he had a certain liberty, we see; people were not hindered from coming to see him; and no doubt Jeremiah continually said to them, what he had proclaimed before, that whoever would submit to the Chaldæans might save himself, for that the Lord would surely give them the city. And some of the chief officers about the king resented his saying this. Read chap. xxxviii. 1–6."

"Sir," said Liph, "I think the princes were perfectly right."

"In their view of the probable effect of Jeremiah's words? Yes, no doubt."

"I think it was treason in him."

"You are short-sighted. Remember, Jeremiah knew what the event of the siege would be. He was simply trying to save his people from the horrors they were bringing on themselves."

"Uncle Sam, what sort of a place was this where they put Jeremiah?"

"A place which they hoped would soon put an end to him. It must have been a pretty deep pit, seeing that they had to lower him into it with ropes, and that the getting him out was a work of such difficulty. Bad air of course, and soft mud at the bottom. Read to the 13th verse. . . . You see, the prophet was left to his fate; and only this stranger, this foreign servant of the king, took pity on him. The king was sitting in the gate of Ephraim, in the north wall of the city, watching perhaps the proceedings of the besiegers, or giving orders about the defence; for there, on the north and north-west, were the dangerous places where Jerusalem was not protected by her deep valleys. There Ebed-melech found the king, and made his representations."

"I wonder Zedekiah cared."

"He was probably afraid to let Jeremiah perish so, now that the information was given him."

"The pit must have been very deep!" said Dan. "For if it had not been, Jeremiah could have held on by his hands till they drew him up. Probably he was sunk in the mud, so that it took a hard pull to get him out."

"I think," said I, "Jeremiah had the sorrowfullest life I ever heard of."

"No," said Uncle Sam. "I can tell you of One other, who felt the ruin of the people yet more deeply, inasmuch as He both loved them better and knew far more thoroughly what the ruin would be."

"O Uncle Sam! do you mean *Him?*" cried I.

"Sir," said Dan, "was the destruction under the Romans worse than this under the Chaldæans?"

"It is spoken of as the utmost of misery. And you know, thus far there has been no return from the dispersion that followed. But beyond that, Liph, the Lord's eyes see the far future as well as the near, and He knows, deeper than any man can, the joys and the sorrows of all human hearts. So He stood and wept over Jerusalem, with a comprehensive view of her fate such as no mere man could take."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FALL OF THE CITY.

"Now we are coming to the taking of the city," said I the next time we came together to read. It was a very beautiful evening, and the light upon hill and valley seemed to be peace itself. From where we sat on the Mount of Olives little or nothing could be seen of the human stir and motion, whether of business or pleasure, within and around the city. Sunshine coming athwart the Mosque of Omar and the trees in the enclosure around it, gilding the domes of the house-roofs, reaching across to the flushing mountains of Moab, bathing the hill where we sat in a full flood of light, the whole scene was beauty and peace. It cost a great effort to imagine such sunlight shining on Nebuchadnezzar's army around the city; and the mounds and watchtowers they had cast up against the walls; engines of attack and defence; the encampments of the soldiers covering all the hills round about. Yet they were there; and Jerusalem, David's and Solomon's Jerusalem, lay there in the midst; and many a time the sun must have shone on both, as he was shining now. We were all thinking of it, I believe, for we all sat still and thoughtful.

"Eighteen months—" said Dan. "The place held out well, considering what there was against it, and who."

"The place was exceedingly strong by nature. And the Jews were always very obstinate fighters; the last men in the world to give up. It seems that the place could not be taken by storm. No doubt the attempt was made, and again and again, and beaten back every time; and with terrible flow of human blood on both sides. So it was wont to be elsewhere, and so no doubt it was here; though the very brief story gives little detail. Meanwhile the famine in the

city grew fearful. It seems that one of the gates in this south-eastern quarter was not so well shut up by the enemy, but that parties could and did make sorties by the way of Jericho to obtain supplies. But all they could do, with great loss and danger, was a mere drop and crumb in the great abyss of need. When the bread in the city was about gone, the poor weak king sent for Jeremiah again. The prophet was brought to him in one of the gateways of the Temple; see Jer. xxxviii. 14; but no one knows which it was. Probably a very retired place where the king thought himself safe from dangerous observation. There he asked Jeremiah what was going to be the issue, or what advice he could give. And Jeremiah told him, what he had told him often before, that to submit to Nebuchadnezzar was the way to safety for himself and the city. The king was afraid of the Jews who had already followed Jeremiah's words and escaped to the Chaldæans; it seems there were a considerable number of them; he was afraid of his nobles and officers at home, who held to the opposite counsel and were bent upon resisting to the last. He was afraid every way; too weak to decide; afraid even to have his interview with Jeremiah made public; so it came to nothing. Read Jer. xxxviii. 14–26. And then the famine and distress grew extreme. In his Lamentations, written later, the prophet describes it; the little children crying for food in the streets, 'saying to their mothers, Where is corn and wine;' and then dying in their mother's arms, for sheer hunger. Worse than that; in the extremity people grew unnatural; and mothers ate the flesh of their own little children. The nobles, delicately brought up, with fair and tender skins, had grown black with starvation; 'their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick.' Read Lam. iv. 1–12."

"I should think they would have given up when things got so bad."

"It is the last thing a Jew knows how to do. All this had been foretold, Liph. Look at what Ezekiel said, in his distant home in Babylon, to whom the events of the siege were made known and by him proclaimed, Ezek. iv. 16, 17.

Then read Lev. xxvi. 23–33. Moses forewarned the people even so long ago. See Jer. xiv. 15–18—xv. 1–9, and xix. 8, 9. And also read Ezek. v."

"Was the city taken at last because they could defend it no longer? for want of strength?"

"It certainly reads so in Kings and in Jer. lii. Then a breach was made in the northern wall. Then came to pass Zephaniah's words, do you remember? 'The noise of a cry from the fish gate, and an howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills;' Zeph. i. 10. The 'second,' you recollect, is the second city; the second fortified; lying to the north of Zion and surrounded with a separate wall. The cry from the north, where the breach was made; then the sounds of terror and despair from the streets where the wild work of the sword was beginning, the invaders pouring in. Then the generals of the invading army entered the city, see Jer. xxxix. 3, six of them, with all the rest of the principal officers, and took up their position in what is called the 'middle gate.' Some suppose this to mean a gate connecting the lower city with Zion; but Zion was not yet broken into apparently; and it is otherwise understood to mean the middle gate in the courts of the Temple. We heard just now of 'the *third* entry in the house of the Lord.' However, the explanatory clause is not given here. I a little incline to think of the scene as Dean Stanley imagines it; the generals coming into the place of most dignity and importance, and taking position there at once, from there to command operations. And there was fearful slaughter at any rate in that sacred place. Probably many had fled to it as a refuge. But 'they made a noise in the house of the Lord as in the day of a solemn feast.' Read Ezekiel's vision, given in the 9th chapter."

"I do not understand that," I said, when it had been read.

"Nor I, perfectly," replied my uncle. "But you see, Tiny, that the Lord had withdrawn from the Holy Place of His sanctuary, and that the prophet saw the courts of the Temple filled with dead bodies; the old men, probably

priests and Levites in charge there, being the first slain. And so it went, from the sanctuary through the city; so was the way in those rude times. It was as Jeremiah describes it—'The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets: my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword.' And when the king and his men of war, still shut up in the upper city, saw that Jerusalem was taken, they made a last vain effort to escape. By the gate between two walls—that must probably mean a gate situated at the end of the Tyropæon valley, between the enclosing wall of Zion on one hand and that of Ophel on the other. Just here, we know, the approach to the city was unguarded; and this way, at the dusk of evening, came the king and his men of war with him, those that had been shut up in Zion; carrying what they dared bring away, and with heads covered in token of the deep abasement of their grief. Down the Kidron valley at first, and making their way eventually to the plains of Jericho, hoping to reach the fords and cross the river into safety. But pursuit was too speedy. Somewhere between the hills and the river, before the fords could be reached, on one of the terraces that go by a succession of descents down to the Jordan, the king was caught; alone, his men of war having scattered from him in the mad flight; each trying to save himself. See now how Ezekiel saw all this in vision and described it beforehand. Read chapter xii."

"But it does not say in Kings that they digged through the wall to get out."

"They doubtless did it. The story is given too sketchily to allow any but the most necessary details. By one gateway the egress might well be too slow."

We were still a minute, and I sat looking and thinking of the scenes that valley below the Ophel had seen. The king's gardens! a paradise of delights, with flowers and fruits and birds and fountains of water. And then, the statue of Moloch, and the infernal fires, and the crowds of base worshippers, and the drums and the cries of children. And then the waste place, where Josiah had broken images

and scattered bones, and defiled the ground; where Jeremiah came out with the little procession of Jerusalem nobles and broke his earthen bottle before them. And then, the dusk of twilight, the Chaldæan watch-fires on the hills, and the line of dark figures hurrying out by the pool of Siloam and fleeing down the valley; in vain too. Now, the Moslem city, and the sun shining on the Mosque of Omar, but the shades gathering in the same valleys, now as then. "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!"

"They took Zedekiah to Riblah," said Liph. "I thought Nebuchadnezzar was at Jerusalem himself."

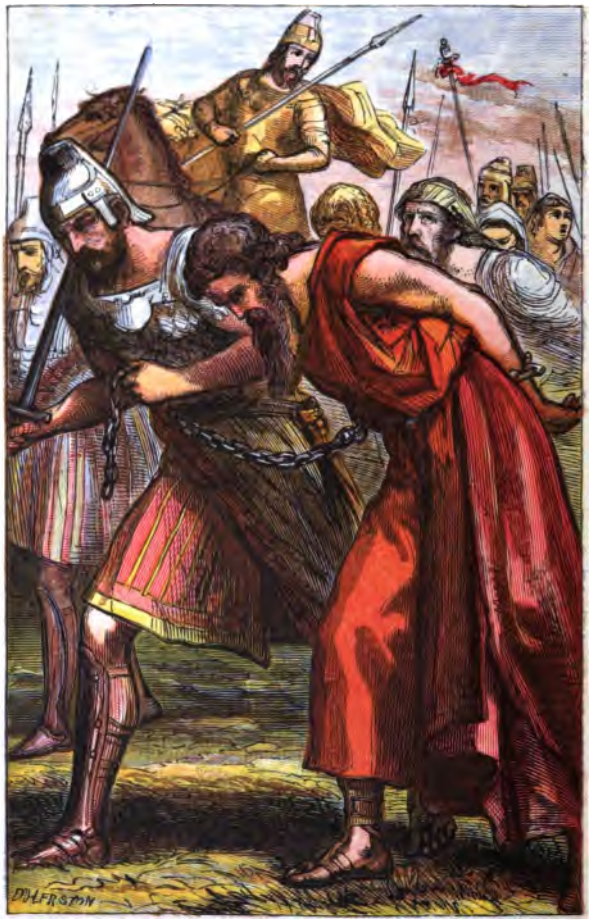
"Not when it fell. The siege of Tyre was going on at the same time, and had lasted already for years; and Nebuchadnezzar very likely thought his presence in that neighbourhood more needed, and got tired of the monotony at Jerusalem. Riblah seems to have been a very important post in those days; as Pharaoh Necho and now Nebuchadnezzar set up his headquarters there."

"And there they brought Zedekiah to him."

"And he was judged and sentenced. Mercy could not be expected of the king of Babylon this time; and the sentence was given and carried out according to the cruel ways of Babylonian courts. Zedekiah must see his own sons slain before his face; possibly, too, the other executions of the nobles and officers who had been brought captive thither. The account of them is given in 2 Kings xxv. 18–21. And then the eyes that had seen all this woe were put out, that they should see nothing more for ever; only those last images of desolation and horror, unreplaced by any others more sweet and gentle, would remain, I should think, before the king's mental vision as long as he lived."

"I suppose there was no particular mercy shewn in the executions either."

"We are not told. Principal offenders were sometimes very barbarously treated; Zedekiah was dealt with rather leniently on the whole. The execution of the personal part of his sentence was probably done by the king himself with his own spear, as the monuments show the like."



KING ZEDEKIAH IN CHAINS CARRIED TO BABYLON.

P. 255.

"Then loaded with chains and carried to Babylon! What became of Jeremiah in the court of the prison?"

"In Jer. lii. 25, mention is made of *seven* men who were near the king's person and taken by Nebuchadnezzar's generals. In 2 Kings xxv. 19, *five* are spoken of whom Nebuzaradan took to Riblah, and who were there executed. The other two of the seven, it is supposed, were Jeremiah and Ebed-melech, whose life had been promised him from the Lord; see Jer. xxxix. 15–18. Of the five mentioned in the list in Kings, Seraiah was the grandfather or great grandfather of Ezra. Zephaniah was the same person probably who is mentioned in Jer. xxxvii. 3; xxi. 1; xxix. 25. The 'three keepers of the door,' it is supposed, were some of the chief rulers of the guard of the Temple. These all went to death. But Jeremiah and some others, who perhaps were known to have taken a different attitude towards the king of Babylon, were carried off to Ramah, and kept there for a few weeks till Nebuzaradan came to accomplish his master's pleasure on the place and the people of Jerusalem."

"A month later. What did he wait for?"

"To receive his orders and to get there. Nebuzaradan was the chief of the king's body-guard—the 'chief of the executioners,' as the title ran; the officer whose business it was to see the king's sentences executed. Potiphar held the same office under Pharaoh. He had not been with the force that took the city. Now he was sent to fulfil the king's pleasure upon it."

"And then the Temple was burned."

"And Solomon's magnificent buildings; the house of the forest of Lebanon, the palace; all houses of any pretension; and the soldiers of the army were set to throw down the walls of the city. Destruction made thorough work this time. Moreover, all the people that were left, from city and country, were carried away to Babylon; everybody of the least consequence; nothing was left but some of the very poorest class, to keep the land from running wild; the people who were entirely without means. All that was still to be found in palace or Temple worth carrying away, followed the

lesser gold and silver vessels to Babylon. Solomon's brazen sea and the brazen bulls which supported it, were broken up, because too heavy to be taken away whole; so with the beautiful brazen pillars of exquisite workmanship. And Jeremiah enumerates the smaller articles which went at the same time; see Jer. lii. 17–23."

"Uncle Sam, in verse 28 of this chapter of Jeremiah it says he carried away, I mean, Nebuchadnezzar carried away, three thousand Jews in his seventh year—that would be the carrying away under Jehoiachin, where the account says ten thousand went."

"This can hardly mean that. In various places an error has crept into the numbers given, through some oversight of a scribe substituting carelessly one letter for another like it. *Here* it is supposed that for the seventh we should read seventeenth; that would make the deportation fall during the siege, after the march of Pharaoh Hophra into the country. I do not know if that is the truth. It might be, well enough."

"It seems to me, sir, there were not many people carried away in all, considering that nothing was left."

"You must remember several things. First, that only men are counted, probably only able-bodied men. We must add the numbers of their families, young and old. Second, the siege lasted eighteen months; and in that time many a life was given up, in fighting or famine or pestilence. Thirdly, that of those outside the city there were many who fled and hid themselves, and afterwards either came back to the emptied land, or joined their fellows in Babylon, thinking it better with them; or took refuge in Egypt and died there."

"And Jerusalem was left nothing but a heap of smoking ruins," said I.

"Nothing but a heap of smoking ruins. Everything gone that had lifted its head in splendour; the stones of the walls lying tossed and piled about; the space within them empty and waste. If you want to know how a Jew felt about it, see Jeremiah's Lamentations.

"'How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! . . . From the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed. . . . Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.' Read chapter ii. 1–9, and 13–17."

"And what became of Jeremiah himself? Nebuzaradan set him at liberty, I know. What did he do then?"

"Look back to Jer. xl. and read from verse 1 to verse 6. Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, who once saved Jeremiah's life (Jer. xxvi. 24), was made governor of the emptied and humbled country, to keep order among what was left. The part Jeremiah had taken during the siege was well known; therefore he was not only liberated but rewarded, and allowed to go whither he would. He chose to stay in the country with Gedaliah. Then, when the Babylonians were all withdrawn, some of the refugees began to gather and show themselves again: and in particular the captains of some of the men of war who had escaped from the city that night with Zedekiah, and more happy than he, had succeeded in getting away among the wilds of the hills and saving themselves. These came now to the governor, and Gedaliah promised them peace and protection if they would behave as good citizens. He would set up his quarters at Mispah—Nebi-Samwil, you know; a couple of hours away from here—to act as a servant of the Chaldæan king and attend to the duties of his office; but they might fearlessly occupy any part of the emptied land, and gather in the harvests and stores which there were so few now to enjoy. Many more Jews came home from the other side of Jordan, and Gedaliah gave them the same assurance and advice; and acting upon it they gathered in a great store from the forsaken fields of the country. But one of the returned captains had engaged in a plot against Gedaliah, instigated or fomented by the king of the Ammonites. This man was himself of the royal line; so perhaps grudged Gedaliah his elevation; or perhaps he hated him as one of the opposite political party, who favoured submission to Babylon."

"There must have been very little of a patriot about him."

"Less than nothing, I should say. Gedaliah was warned by the other officers that there was a plot against his life; Gedaliah would not believe it; and when the conspirators came, he entertained them at his table as friends. Then they took their opportunity, broke all the bonds of hospitality, and killed him, with all others that happened to be in the house; for that seems to be the sense of ch. xli. 3. Now you may read the whole story in chapters xl. and xli."

"What was that pit that Asa had made for fear of Baasha?"

"I cannot say. Nor can anybody."

"Pray why did Ishmael kill those people from the north, that came with offerings?"

"It is difficult to determine. It can hardly have been for mere robbery's sake. The purpose of the Ammonite king was no doubt the utter devastation of the land. It did not suit with that purpose that Israelites from the upper country should hold to the old centralising love and worship. Better break all that up, perhaps Ishmael thought."

"I am sorry he escaped," said Dan. "Then, what possessed the rest of the people, the best of what was left, to want to go to Egypt?"

"They were afraid the Chaldæans would avenge the murder of Gedaliah on whomsoever they found, don't you see?"

"What is the 'habitation of Chimham'?"

"Do you remember old Barzillai, David's friend in Gilead, who acted as the host of the king when he took refuge in Gilead from the rebellion of Absalom? Chimham was Barzillai's son. He accompanied David on his return, and besides being a rich man himself was no doubt greatly distinguished and favoured by the king. He built a khan at Bethlehem for the entertainment of travellers. The word translated 'habitation' means a khan. Such khans are often very spacious places; and there the company assembled who were minded to go down into Egypt."

"How stupid of them!" said Dan.

"Natural enough too," said Uncle Sam. "They wanted to be where they would 'see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet.' Jeremiah told them the way to escape those dreaded things was to stay quietly in the land where they were. Read ch. xlii."

"Why did they ask counsel of Jeremiah, if they did not mean to follow it?" said Liph.

"Why do people ever ask counsel when they do not mean to follow it? They wanted him to advise in accordance with their wishes. When the advice went contrary to them, they disobeyed it. So they ran into the trouble they thought to flee."

"How, Uncle Sam?"

"They went down to Egypt, carrying Jeremiah with them, and settled first at Tahpenes, a town near the border. And some years later when Nebuchadnezzar had reduced Tyre, he came to Egypt and laid his strong hand upon her. The poor fugitive Jews saw war again and heard the sound of the trumpet; the same trumpet tone which they had learned to dread. You may read Jer. xliii. and xliv."

We read them.

"So the land was left empty of everybody," said I.

"Except the very poorest. She lay desolate and 'enjoyed her Sabbaths.'"

"How do you mean?"

"When the people refused to keep the Sabbaths the Lord had appointed, He did as He had said; cast them out of the land and gave the land an enforced succession of Sabbaths for many a day. The ground lay untilled, unsown, unreaped. See Lev. xxvi. 34, 35."

"Did Jeremiah stay in Egypt the rest of his life?"

"It is not known."

"And the city here, Jerusalem, had nobody in it?"

"The mountain of Zion was 'desolate,' 'foxes walked upon it.' Lam. v. 18. That is, jackals."

We sat silent and looked. The twilight was falling, and lights beginning to appear here and there. As the shades of night drew over the city and details of architecture were

lost, it was easier to imagine it a ruin, broken and empty, where no light was seen for many a day. Jackals making their home in the ruins, as their way is, and having it all to themselves. I knew the cry of the jackal well enough, for we hear it every night; and if anything could finish the impression of desolation, it is the image of those creatures prowling and wailing alone over the deserted site of the city; where the Temple, and the worshipping crowds, and the royal splendours of the kings had been. I could understand Jeremiah's mournful cry—"How doth the city sit solitary!"

THE END.

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